

producebusiness

MARKETING • MERCHANDISING • MANAGEMENT • PROCUREMENT

25
YEARS
INITIATING
INDUSTRY
IMPROVEMENT



3rd ANNUAL Retail Sustainability Award:

H-E-B

Partnering For Success



INSIDE:

THE PUNDIT LOOKS AT LOCALLY GROWN
GREENHOUSE PRODUCE • STATE DEPARTMENTS OF AGRICULTURE
SOUTH AFRICAN CITRUS • RIPEMED FRUIT
TIE-INS • SOUTHERN VEGETABLES
ORGANIC BERRIES • MANGOS • CHERRIES • STONE FRUIT
PORTABLE SNACKS • FLORAL CARE AND HANDLING



The DOLE brand is synonymous with high quality and safety for fresh fruit and vegetables. Dole leads the way in nutrition education, helping consumers to achieve a healthy lifestyle.



COVER PHOTO BY TOMMY HULTGREN

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THIS MONTH'S WINNER



Dana Ostwald
Produce Specialist
Dan's Supermarket
Bismark, ND

Dana Ostwald has been with Dan's Supermarket, a Bismark, ND, chain of six stores, for 34 years. During his tenure at the store, which has been around for 50-plus years, Ostwald has always been involved in the produce department. "Nothing else in the grocery store has any interest to me," he admits. "It is the most creative and dynamic. I started as a produce clerk, and worked my way up to produce management. I've been in procurement for the past 14 years."

Despite the geographical location, Dan's sells a great deal of Florida produce. "We

load our own trucks from there. Our guy works his way through the state getting what we need," he notes. "We also load trucks from California and the Northwest regions, especially for stone fruit."

Ostwald enjoys the challenge of the produce business. "Plus, it's very fast-paced," he says. "There is never a dull moment, and every day brings something new. He stays on top of the industry by reading PRODUCE BUSINESS regularly. "I have been reading it for 20 years, at least. Given my position in procurement, it gives me good ideas and new contacts in the grower/shipper arena."

pb

How To Win! To win the PRODUCE BUSINESS Quiz, the first thing you have to do is enter. The rules are simple: Read through the articles and advertisements in this issue to find the answers. Fill in the blanks corresponding to the questions below, and either cut along the dotted line or photocopy the page, and send your answers along with a business card or company letterhead to the address listed on the coupon. The winner will be chosen by drawing from the responses received before the publication of our July issue of PRODUCE BUSINESS. The winner must agree to submit a color photo to be published in that issue.

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QUESTIONS FOR THE MAY ISSUE

- 1) What is the phone number for Baero ? _____
- 2) What two cherry programs does CMI promote? _____
- 3) What is the booth number for Crunch Pak at United Fresh? _____
- 4) In what educational program does Green Giant participate? _____
- 5) Who is the New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture ? _____
- 6) Name two collections offered by USA Bouquet. _____

This issue was: ☐ Personally addressed to me ☐ Addressed to someone else

Name _____ Position _____
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MORE FRUITS AND VEGETABLES COMING TO SCHOOL MEALS

By Lorelei DiSogra,
Ed.D., R.D., Vice President, Nutrition & Health,
United Fresh Produce Association

Improving children's nutrition and health by providing more nutritious school meals is a top priority for First Lady Michelle Obama's *Let's Move!* initiative. To support this goal, USDA issued updated nutrition standards for school meals in January of 2011, and fruits and vegetables are the big winners.

Overall, the amount of fruits and vegetables served in school breakfast and lunch will double. As USDA notes, the greatest change proposed for school breakfast is the increase in fruit, which doubles from the current requirement to one cup per day. For school lunch, the greatest change is the increase in fruits and vegetables, an increase of almost four servings a week. The new nutrition standards will align school meals with the 2005 and 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

Specifically regarding fruits and vegetables, the proposed provisions will:

- Require schools to serve double the amount of fruit at breakfast
- Require schools to serve double the amount of fruits and vegetables served at lunch
- Require schools to serve both a fruit and a vegetable at lunch
- Require schools to serve a colorful variety of vegetables every week

In addition to increasing the amount of fruits and vegetables served, the new nutrition standards will increase whole grains, reduce the amount of sodium and saturated fat and set maximum calorie levels for school meals.

One aspect of USDA's proposed guidance that is opposed by many groups including United Fresh, the National Potato Council and the School Nutrition Association is the limitation on starchy vegetables, including white potatoes and corn, to only one cup per week. It is important to note that the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans do not limit or restrict starchy vegetables, including white potatoes. For school-age children, the Dietary Guidelines recommend three-and-a-half cups

to five cups of starchy vegetables per week; therefore the new nutrition standards should not restrict starchy vegetables. Rather, the focus should be on healthy preparation, like baking, roasting or boiling.

USDA issued the new nutrition standards as a proposed rule open to public comment for 90 days. It's estimated that more than 150,000 comments were submitted to USDA during that period, which closed April 13. USDA intends to issue a final rule by early 2012, which will require the 101,000 schools nation-wide to implement the new nutrition standards by the 2012-13 school year.

It is critically important that school meals are models of good nutrition and include lots

of USDA's new nutrition standards for school meals. We have urged USDA for many years to update the nutrition standards for school meals because they currently include less fruits and vegetables than recommended by the Dietary Guidelines. We also played a leadership role in securing passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which provided an increase of \$.06 for each school lunch specifically tied to schools serving more fruits, vegetables and whole grains. More recently, United Fresh worked with many public health groups and others interested in healthier school meals to support the strong fruit and vegetable changes in the proposed rule and highlight fruits and vegetables in their official comments to USDA.

"Make half your plate fruits and vegetables," is one of the key consumer messages of the 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The Dietary Guidelines are the federal government's evidence-based guidance to promote health, reduce risk of chronic diseases and reduce the prevalence of obesity and

ONCE FINAL, THE NEW NUTRITION STANDARDS WILL BENEFIT MORE THAN 32 MILLION SCHOOL CHILDREN EVERY DAY.

weight problems through improved nutrition and physical activity, and are published every five years by the USDA and the Department of Health and Human Services. The recommendation applies to all meals, including school breakfast and school lunch. Once implemented, the proposed rule would double the amount of fruits and vegetables served in school meals and will result in school meals modeling the "half-a-plate" recommendation.

It's been 15 years since school meals were last updated. Hundreds of schools nationwide are already serving more fresh fruits and vegetables. Their students are trying new fruits and vegetables and increasing their overall consumption. Once final, the new nutrition standards will benefit more than 32 million school children every day. This is an incredible win for children and an incredible win for the produce industry.

United Fresh has worked for many years to increase the variety and amount of fresh fruits and vegetables served in school meals as a strategy to increase children's overall fruit and vegetable consumption. United Fresh testified twice before the Institute of Medicine's Advisory Committee, which developed "School Meals: Building Blocks for Healthy Children," the recommendations that formed the basis for



2010 MARKETING EXCELLENCE AWARD WINNERS

- Avocados From Mexico
- California Giant Berry Farms
- Columbia Marketing International Corp.
- Dole Fresh Vegetables
- Earthbound Farm
- Idaho Potato Commission
- Litehouse Foods
- National Mango Board
- Ocean Mist Farms/Wegmans
- Pandol Brothers Inc.
- Tanimura & Antle
- University of Massachusetts
- Vidalia Onion Committee

TURN YOUR MARKETING INTO AN **AWARDING** EXPERIENCE

Right now, and on through June 3, 2011, we're taking entries for the **23rd Annual Marketing Excellence Awards Program**, presented by **PRODUCE BUSINESS**. The awards recognize excellence in marketing in each of six categories: retailers, restaurants, wholesalers, shippers, commodity organizations and service providers. Print, broadcast and other media are eligible to win.

To participate, send us the following for each entry:

1. Your name, company, address and phone.

2. Type of business.

3. Name and dates of promotion (must have taken place between June 1, 2010 and June 1, 2011).

4. Promotion objectives.

5. Description of promotion.

6. Promotion results (sales or traffic increases, media attention, etc.). What made this program a success?

7. All support materials used in the promotion – such as POP, ads, posters, TV commercials.

High-resolution images to illustrate the promotion are encouraged. (Please do not send any produce)

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Deadline for entries is June 3, 2011

For additional information, call: 561-994-1118, Ext. 101

PESTICIDE USAGE UNDER ATTACK AGAIN

By James Previor
President & Editor-in-Chief



Yogi Berra is a member of the baseball Hall of Fame; one of only four players to be named Most Valuable Player of the American League three separate times; one of just six managers to lead both an American League and a National League team to the World Series. Many consider him the best catcher in the history of baseball.

Yet he is, perhaps, most well known for his frequent malapropisms, or incorrect use of language. One of his most famous lines came from a time in the early 1960s when Mickey Mantle and Roger Marris seemed to constantly be hitting back to back home runs and Yogi declared that it was “dèjà vu all over again.”

Those active in the produce industry for the past few decades are bound to start thinking about Yogi and that feeling of dèjà vu all over again. With the release of a study by Brenda Eskenazi and various colleagues from the University of California at Berkley in a journal titled, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, proclaiming that there is a link between maternal exposure to pesticides — specifically organophosphate pesticides — and lower intelligence — specifically seven points lower on IQ tests given to the children when they reached seven years of age — the focus of activist interest in the produce industry is transitioning away from the pathogen concerns of the past few years to a new focus on pesticides.

This particular study is very weak and really tells nothing about the issue of eating fresh produce. The researchers did several studies, but the key one was a birth-cohort study drawn from a group of mostly Latino farm workers in an agricultural community in California. Right away, this means that whatever the issue might be regarding pesticides, it is more likely an issue related to those who have far greater exposure to pesticides — for example farm workers — than it is related to consumption of fresh produce.

Even on the issue of how pesticides affect the IQ of farm worker children, the research leaves much to be desired. We have extensive and well-documented research indicating that many variables can impact intelligence — use of drugs, consumption of alcohol, smoking, etc. — yet the study makes no attempt to control for these variables.

Strangely, though the researchers did adjust for the mother’s IQ and education, they did not adjust for the IQ or education of the father. This is odd. The fact the researchers made the adjustments on the maternal side clearly indicates that they thought it relevant, but there is no theory of genetics that holds that intelligence is only inherited down the maternal line.

The study was built around a urine analysis seeking metabolites of organophosphate — a metabolite is a substance produced as the body’s

metabolism processes another substance. Yet this methodology does not establish any connection with any actual pesticide, much less with pesticide consumption on fruits and vegetables. In fact, the study clearly states: “These six metabolites cannot be traced back to individual pesticides...”

The researchers also decided to add in numbers when none exist. For example, there are limits in the ability to detect things in lab tests. That means we don’t know if the particular substance is present or not, or in what amount it is present if it is there at all, except to say that it is below the level of detectability. These researchers, perhaps looking to put a thumb on the scale, decided to impute the existence of these unknown and undetectable substances:

“Concentrations below the limit of detection (LOD) were randomly imputed based on a log-normal probability distribution whose parameters were estimated using maximum likelihood estimation.”

In other words, the results are phony and include imputed amounts that we don’t know exist.

Finally, the study authors have to acknowledge that “...children’s urinary DAP concentrations were not consistently associated with cognitive scores.” DAP stands for dialkyl phosphate, the key metabolite that was being studied.

So the thesis is that children’s level of this metabolite — collected at six months, 1, 2, 3½ and 5 years of age — has no impact on IQ scores and thus cognitive function, but that being the child of a mother in the highest quintile of organophosphate metabolite concentration causes a seven point differential, on the negative side, in IQ scores at age seven.

Of course, none of this may matter at all. Within moments of releasing the study, it was picked up by countless Web sites and publications with scary headline such as, “Pesticides Make Us Dumber,” and various talking heads were giving advice, such as urging people to consume only organically grown fruits and vegetables — although the study did not apply to men at all, nor to post-menopausal women and was dubious regarding any impact at all from consumption of produce.

Years ago, I would travel the country to speak and the focus was all on pesticides. I warned all my audiences that the real issue was pathogens. Now, like dèjà vu all over again, we have studies like this, combining with enthusiasm for the “precautionary principle,” or the belief that if something can possibly have a bad impact, we shouldn’t do it. And now we will see a new focus on pesticides.

Of course, the real issue isn’t just the safety of pesticides; the real issue is the alternative. First, by focusing on one class of pesticides and one theorized side effect, we can’t know if eliminating this class of pesticides would be a net good or bad — that can only be done by comparing this class of chemicals to an alternative. Second, in a world without pesticides, we would have trouble raising enough food to feed the people of world. The implications of such a problem are chilling.

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PRODUCE WATCH

TRANSITIONS

BROOKS TROPICALS, LLC HOMESTEAD, FL

Greg Smith has joined the tropical produce company as CEO. Smith comes to Brooks Tropicals after 37 years at Coca-Cola, with a background in operations, finance, auditing and procurement.



THE OPPENHEIMER GROUP COQUITLAM, BC, CANADA

Chayla Balko has joined the company's Chicago office as a business development representative serving retail, wholesale and foodservice clients in the U.S. Midwest. Balko is responsible for implementing effective promotions for Oppenheimer products in partnership with customers in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin.



WISHNATZKI FARMS PLANT CITY, FL

Darwin Reich was recently hired as director of California operations. Reich will oversee Misty Ranch, the company's joint venture with Berry Valley Farms in Salinas, CA. He will also recruit independent growers in California who want to sell their crops through Wishnatzki's marketing arm. Reich was previously operations manager for NorCal Harvesting in Salinas.



STATUS GRO SOUTH PASADENA, CA

Emily Fragoso joins Status Gro as the director of business development at Status Gro. Fragoso will be working alongside Jin Ju Wilder as they establish this newly founded company, which is dedicated to developing and executing strategic plans, offering core story development, advertising and marketing, project management, team building and bid/proposal writing for companies in the produce industry.



GIUMARRA COMPANIES LOS ANGELES, CA

Jeannine Martin joins the company as director of sales for the Reedley division. She has worked in the produce industry since 1977, and most recently held a sales and account representative position with Fruit Patch Sales LLC.



Bob Faulkner joins as salesperson within the Reedley office. Previously, he was director of sales at Double D Farms, a grower, packer and shipper of organic fruits and vegetables based in Coalinga, CA.



NEW PRODUCTS

THE MARCHINI ALMOND HITS RETAIL STANDS

The Marchini family has been granted a patent from the United States Patents and Trademarks Office in 2001 for the Marchini Almond variety of the almond tree. Marchini Almonds are medium-sized, have slightly wrinkled skin and the tree produces an abundant number of almonds. Available exclusively from J. Marchini Farms in Le Grand, CA, the popular 8-oz. resealable container retails for \$3.99 to \$5.99.



FRUIT SNACK OFFERED BY NAYA

Budd Lake, NJ-based Naya Imports, an importer/distributor of Medjool Dates, Deglet Noor dates and Pomegranate Arils, is pleased to announce that it has become the newest distributor of Buddy Fruits, a 100 percent fruit snack packed in kid-friendly packaging, which offers easy, on-the-go consumption. Their gummy style fruit comes in four flavors: Pomegranate/Acai, Raspberry, Orange and Apple.



GROW-IT-AT-HOME MUSHROOMS

Back to the Roots (BTR Ventures), Oakland, CA, has introduced grow-it-at-home oyster mushroom kits, now available at retailers across the United States. The kits utilize recycled coffee grounds in place of dirt to grow the oyster mushrooms.



MANGO WITH ARTIST'S TOUCH

Vision Import Group LLC of River Edge, NJ, and Tavilla Sales of Los Angeles, CA, announce their new brand of Van Gogh ataulfo mangos. Ataulfo mangos are sweet and fibreless. Available in 9-lb boxes now through August with national distribution.



NEW WAYS TO ENTERTAIN

Yucatan Foods, Los Angeles, CA, proudly presents Cabo Fresh™, a healthy and delicious produce brand. Items include: Authentic, Mild-Organic and new Spicy Guacamole, in mild and medium, and new Chipotle Salsa; Bruschetta and Avo-Hummus™, 50 percent avocado blended with 50 percent hummus.

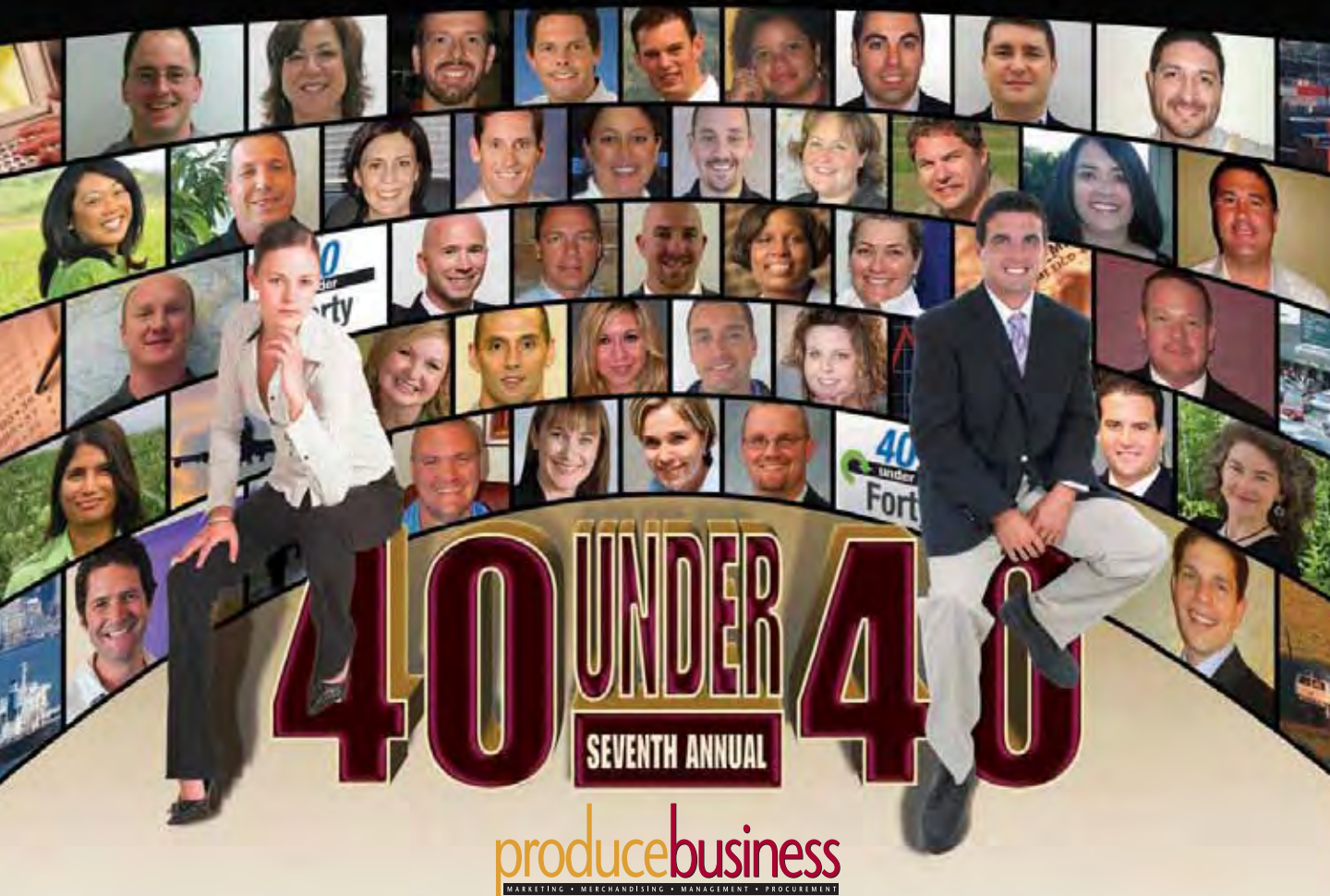


FARMER'S BEST HANDLING GUIDES

One of Mexico's premier grower/shipper in Nogales, AZ, has just released *Getting The Best From Your Grapes*, the latest two-page guide featuring industry and proprietary research geared to helping retailers maximize the category during Spring grape season. It is available via the company's merchandisers, for retailer download on its weekly blog site or in quantities for personnel education.



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PRODUCE BUSINESS is accepting nominations for its Seventh Annual 40-Under-Forty Project, which recognizes the produce industry's top young leaders.

Honorees will be selected based on their professional accomplishments, demonstrated leadership and industry/community contributions. To be eligible, nominees must be under the age of 40 as of January 1 (People born after January 1, 1971).

To nominate someone, please fill out this form by May 2, 2011, and fax back to 561-994-1610.

Once nominated, the candidate will receive forms from us to fill out asking for detailed information. A candidate only needs to be nominated one time. Multiple nominations will have no bearing on selection.

ABOUT THE NOMINEE:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
 Approximate Age _____
 Company _____
 Position _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____
 Country _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____
 E-mail _____

In 100 words or less, describe why this person should be nominated:
 (You can use a separate sheet for this)

Nominee's Professional Achievements:

Nominee's Industry/Community/Charitable Activities:

ABOUT THE NOMINATOR:

First Name _____ Last Name _____
 Company _____
 Position _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Postal Code _____
 Country _____
 Phone _____ Fax _____
 E-mail _____

Nominator information is for our use only and will not be shared with candidate or have a bearing on selection.

For more information email: info@producebusiness.com

PRODUCE WATCH

NEW PRODUCTS

SNACKS ON THE GO!

Mann Packing Co. Inc., Salinas, CA, will unveil its new Snacks On The Go!™, a full line of fresh-cut vegetable and fruit packaged in multiple combinations for snacking convenience, at the United Fresh 2011 convention in New Orleans. Available in multiple sizes and varieties, the multipacks are designed to meet the lunch box treat occasion and portion-control eating occasions.



CRUNCH PAK AND DISNEY INTRODUCE FRESH SLICED APPLES

Crunch Pak, based in Cashmere, WA, is collaborating with Disney Consumer Products (DCP) to introduce a line of fresh sliced apple products featuring popular Disney characters such as Phineas and Ferb. Last month, DCP announced its commitment to helping families eat more healthful foods by expanding its produce offering to make Disney-branded produce widely available and offer more product variety.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHIQUITA ROLLS OUT THE RED CARPET FOR RIO

Chiquita Brands International announced a unique marketing partnership with Twentieth Century Fox to promote Rio, a 3-D animated motion picture. This month, at retail, consumers will find Rio versions of Chiquita's iconic stickers on Chiquita bananas and Chiquita Fresh & Ready avocados.



EUROPEAN FLAVORS DEBUTS IN CANADA

The European Flavors project, aimed at promoting the taste and quality of European fruit and vegetables, kicks off in Canada for its second three-year activity cycle, which is scheduled to end in 2013. As part of the European Flavors project, a program of high-profile communication and promotional activities will be carried out in mass retail outlets throughout Canada.



DOLE FOOD COMPANY GROWS SCHOOL GARDEN PROGRAM

Dole Food Company, recently joined the Environmental Media Association (EMA), actress and advocate Emmanuelle Chiqui, and Carson High School students and officials to mark the dedication of a garden at the Los Angeles school facilities as part of Dole's efforts to support gardens and greening in urban schools across Los Angeles.



PURITY ORGANIC ARGENTINE PEAR PROGRAM EXPECTED TO DOUBLE

New technology, optimal growing conditions and increased category demand provide the perfect storm for Argentina's organic pear season. Purity Organic Produce's (formerly Pacific Organic Produce) Argentine organic pear program is expected to deliver more than double the volume over last year's level. The pears arrive in three different pack styles; 10kg, 12.5 kg (Euroboxes), and 18kg.



How To Make Things Grow

Whatever your role in the produce industry, the key to a blossoming bottom line is knowledge. About major trends and developments, and the people behind them.... About new sales opportunities around the world.... New packaging and transportation technology.... New ideas in marketing and promotion.... New retail strategies.... New equipment and services.... New techniques for managing individual businesses, and their personnel, more efficiently.

And your Number 1 source for all of the above is PRODUCE BUSINESS, the industry's only monthly business magazine serving all buying segments. And the most widely read of any publication in the field. If you're not receiving every important issue, call to start your subscription without delay. It's the only way to be sure you're getting all the knowledge you need. And growing the way you should.

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I Expect Results.

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PRODUCE WATCH

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FRIEDA'S BEGINS 50TH YEAR

Frieda's kicks off its 50th anniversary celebration. On April 2nd, Jackie Caplan Wiggins, vice president; Frieda Rapoport Caplan, founder; and Karen Caplan, president and CEO (pictured), celebrate the company's 49th anniversary and officially kick off their 50th year in business. Frieda, 87, began the specialty produce company on the same date in 1962, at the Los Angeles Wholesale Produce Market.



CLEAR LAM EARNS USDA BIO-BASED CERTIFICATION

Renewable thermoformed produce packaging developed by Clear Lam Packaging, Inc. has earned the industry's first USDA Certified Biobased Product Label, part of a new voluntary labeling program to help purchasers choose products made with bio-based commodities. Deputy Agriculture Secretary, Kathleen Merrigan, unveiled the nation's first products approved to display the new USDA product label at a bio-based product meeting held near Cleveland, OH.



MANN PACKING SUPPORTS SPRING SALES WITH MULTIPLE PROMOTIONS

Mann Packing is supporting its spring sales program with multiple promotions. Beginning last month, Mann is placing instant redeemable coupons on 100,000 packages of 8-oz. stringless sugar snap peas and 12-oz. green beans. The offer is good for \$1 savings on any two packages of the Mann's products purchased.



OPPENHEIMER TEAMS UP WITH ONTARIO GREENHOUSE PARTNERS

The Oppenheimer Group has entered into its first-ever exclusive Ontario greenhouse partnership with two greenhouse growers. Geo Produce and Platinum Produce Company of Chatham-Kent, Ontario, joined Oppenheimer's family of growers in March. This pair of partners enhances Oppenheimer's greenhouse program with strategically located volume and assortment.



expect the world from us

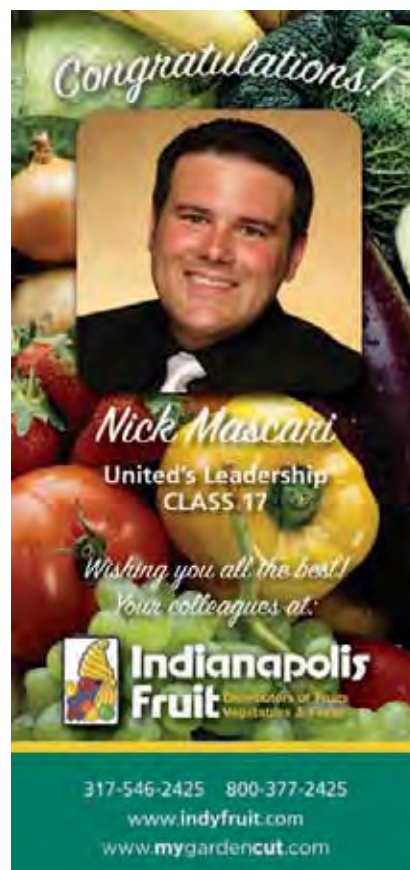
HOLLANDIA ACHIEVES PRIMUS GFSI FOOD SAFETY CERTIFICATION

Carpinteria, CA-based Hollandia Produce LLC claims to be the first North American greenhouse producer of hydroponically grown living lettuces and leafy greens to achieve a Primus Global Food Safety Initiative Certification. With a HACCP score of 100 percent and an overall superior audit score of 99.21 percent, the company's management and staff are very pleased to achieve certification.



SUPERFRESHGROWERS.COM WINS AWARD

Yakima, WA-based Domex Superfresh Growers has been recognized for its recently redesigned consumer-friendly Web site. The American Advertising Federation selected the site for its design and ready access to helpful information and current news about fruit and how it is grown and used.



Produce Watch is a regular feature of Produce Business. Please send information on new products, personnel changes, industry, corporate and personal milestones and available literature, along with a color photo, slide or transparency to: Managing Editor, Produce Business, P.O. Box 810425, Boca Raton, FL 33481-0425, or e-mail us at info@producebusiness.com

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DOLE SPONSORS SUSTAINABILITY FORUM ATTENDED BY AL GORE

Westlake Village, CA-based Dole Food Company was one of the main sponsors of Costa Rica's first Business Forum on Sustainability and the Environment this past March. This forum was organized by Terra Partners, the first company in the region specialized in green marketing. Pictured next to Al Gore is Dole Latin America president, Jonathan Bass.

**COWART FARMS AMONG FIRST TO USE PUNGENCY PLUS PROGRAM**

Lyons, GA-based Cowart Farms is one of the growers of Vidalia onions to be participating in the new Pungency Plus flavor certification program for onions. The Pungency Plus program, developed by Collins, GA-based National Onion Labs, is a protocol to directly measure the flavor compounds that consumers taste in sweet onions.

**AVOCADOS FROM MEXICO SPONSORS FIRST NATIONAL AVOCADO TAKEDOWN EVENT**

On April 10, 19 local amateur cooks put their avocado recipes to the test in the nation's first-ever Avocado Takedown. Avocado enthusiasts gathered to watch contestants whip up unique dishes made with Avocados from Mexico for a chance to win \$500 in cash prizes, cookware and bragging rights. Admission was \$10 and included unlimited tastings. The competition was open to all amateur and home cooks.

**LAUNCH OF STATUS GRO**

Jin Ju Wilder has launched South Pasadena, CA-based Status Gro, which will develop and execute strategic plans, offer core story development, advertising and marketing, project management, team building and bid/proposal writing for companies. Prior to launching Status Gro, Wilder served as President of Coast Produce.

**DEL MONTE DELIVERS FRESH FRUIT TO ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

Del Monte Fresh recently gave more than 525 students and teachers at Sun City Elementary in Bossier City, LA, a truckload of Del Monte fresh fruit and active fruit games. At the event, students were given all the Del Monte fresh bananas, pineapples and melons they could eat, while learning about the importance of eating healthfully.

**POTATO INDUSTRY LAUNCHES WEB SITE TO KEEP POTATOES IN SCHOOLS**

The potato industry launched a new website, PotatoesInSchools.com, to inform school food-service providers, nutrition opinion leaders, consumers and potato industry stakeholders of the issues surrounding the proposed changes to the School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), which significantly limit the amount of starchy vegetables, including potatoes, which can be served in schools.

**California Giant**

Congratulates

Jerry Moran

Congratulations to Jerry for graduating from the United Leadership Program Class 16.

We also congratulate Jerry and Sandra on the arrival of their son, Grant who arrived during the program year.

We applaud Jerry for mastering two leadership challenges at once.



**MAY 2 - 5, 2011
UNITED FRESH 2011**

The United Fresh Marketplace features marketers and merchandisers of fresh produce for retail, foodservice and wholesale levels of trade.

Conference Venue: Ernest N. Morial Convention Center, New Orleans, LA

Conference Management: United Fresh Produce Association, Washington DC

Phone: 202-303-3424 • **Fax:** 202-303-3433

Email: united@unitedfresh.org

Website: www.unitedfresh.org

**May 11 - 13, 2011
SIAL CANADA 2011**

This international tradeshow, dedicated to food industry professionals, targets the North American market.

Conference Venue: Palais Des Congres De Montreal, Montreal, Canada

Conference Management: Imex Management, Inc., Charlotte, NC

Phone: 704-365-0041 • **Fax:** 704-365-8426

Email: ErichH@ImexManagement.com

Website: www.imexmgt.com

**May 11 - 14, 2011
HOFEX 2011**

The 14th international exhibition of food & drink, hotel, restaurant & food service equipment, supplies and services.

Conference Venue: Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Conference Management: Overseas Exhibition Services Ltd, London

Phone: 442-078-402146 • **Fax:** 442-078-402111

Email: hofex@oesallworld.com

Website: www.hofex.com

**May 18 - 20, 2011
SIAL CHINA 2011**

The 12th international food, beverage, wine & spirits exhibition in China.

Conference Venue: Shanghai New Int'l Expo Centre of Pudong, Shanghai, China

Conference Management: IMEX Management, Inc., Charlotte, NC

Phone: 704-365-0041 • **Fax:** 704-365-8426

Email: erich@imexmanagement.com

Website: www.imexmgt.com

**May 21 - 24, 2011
NRA SHOW 2011**

The National Restaurant Association Restaurant, Hotel-Motel Show is the largest single gathering of restaurant, foodservice and lodging professionals in the Western Hemisphere.

Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago, IL

Conference Management: National Restaurant Association, Chicago, IL

Phone: 312-853-2537 • **Fax:** 312-853-2548

Email: kskibbe@restaurant.org

Website: www.restaurant.org/show

**May 21 - 24, 2011
AMERICAN FOOD FAIR 2011**

The exposition works to provide a wealth of education, research, industry relations, government affairs services and the ultimate restaurant, catering, lodging exposition in North and South America.

Conference Venue: McCormick Place, Chicago, IL

Conference Management: NASDA, Fairfax, VA

Phone: 703-934-4700 • **Fax:** 703-934-4899

Email: aff@cmgexpo.com

Website: www.nasdatradeshow.org

**May 25 - 27, 2011
WORLD FOOD AZERBAIJAN 2011**

World Food Azerbaijan covers all aspects of the food and drink industry, making it an effective forum for food suppliers to promote their products to thousands of local producers,

distributors, wholesalers, retailers and restaurateurs.

Conference Venue: Sport & Exhibition Complex Baku, Baku, Azerbaijan

Conference Management: ITE Group Pic, London, UK

Phone: 442-075-965086 • **Fax:** 442-077-596511

Email: food@iteca.az

Website: www.worldfood.az

**May 25 - 29, 2011
THAIFEX - WORLD OF FOOD ASIA 2011**

International trade fair covering food & beverage, food catering, food technology, hospitality service and retail & franchise.

Conference Venue: Impact Exhibition & Convention Center, Bangkok, Thailand

Conference Management: Koelnmesse Pte, Inc.

Phone: 656-500-6711

Email: Lhow@koelnmesse.com.sg

Website: www.worldoffoodasia.com

**JUNE 1 - 3, 2011
ALIMENTARIA MEXICO 2011**

Visiting the trade fair will allow you to sample the very latest in the sector, find out where the market is heading and establish business relations directly, with no middle-men.

Conference Venue: Centro Banamex, Mexico City, Mexico

Conference Management: E.J. Krause & Associates Inc., Bethesda, MD

Phone: 301-493-5500 • **Fax:** 301-493-5705

Email: swagart@ejkrause.com

Website: www.alimentaria-mexico.com

**June 5 - 6, 2011
DAIRY-DELI-BAKE 2011**

The largest show in the world serving these categories.

Conference Venue: Anaheim Convention Center, Anaheim, CA

Conference Management: International Dairy Deli Bakery Association, Madison, WI

Phone: 608-310-5000 • **Fax:** 608-238-6330

Email: IDDBA@iddba.org

Website: www.iddba.org

**June 14 - 17, 2011
IFE 2011**

International Floriculture Expo (formerly The Super Floral Show) is the only U.S. venue where people from every aspect of the floriculture industry will converge under one roof.

Conference Venue: Miami Beach Convention Center, Miami, FL

Conference Management: Diversified Business Communications, Portland, ME

Phone: 207-842-5424 • **Fax:** 207-842-5505

Email: floriexpo@divcom.com

Website: www.floriexpo.com

**JULY 10 - 12, 2011
NASFT SUMMER FANCY FOOD SHOW 2011**

North America's largest specialty food and beverage event.

Conference Venue: Walter E. Washington Convention Center, Washington DC

Conference Management: NASFT, New York, NY

Phone: 212-482-6440 • **Fax:** 212-482-6459

Website: www.fancyfoodshows.com

**July 29 - 31, 2011
PMA FOODSERVICE CONFERENCE TOURS & EXPO 2011**

The PMA Foodservice Conference and exposition is the only event focused exclusively on fresh produce in foodservice and is widely rated by attendees as one of the industry's best values for learning and networking.

Conference Venue: Portola Plaza Hotel, Monterey, CA

Conference Management: Produce Marketing Association, Newark, DE

Phone: 302-738-7100 • **Fax:** 302-731-2409

Email: solutionctr@pma.com

Website: www.pma.com

To submit events to our Forward Thinking calendar, please email info@producebusiness.com



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Marketing To Baby Boomers Today

BY STEVEN MURO, PRESIDENT, FUSION MARKETING

Baby Boomers' Attitude Towards Healthy Eating

Baby Boomers aspire to maintain a healthy lifestyle, according to the results of the "Healthy Eating" survey conducted by NPD Group, a market research company based in Port Washington, NY. The survey revealed that the No. 1 motivator for Baby Boomers is eating right. Yet further exploration into the research shows that these aspirations do not always mirror reality.

When comparing consumers' actual consumption of various food groups to USDA's HEI (Healthy Eating Index), an aggregate measure of overall healthfulness of a diet, the findings uncovered distinct opportunities for improving healthful eating habits. The No. 1 opportunity for Boomers is the increased consumption of fresh fruit. This is followed in varying degrees by dairy and vegetables.

The Challenge

Consumers expect to have what they want, the way they want it. They expect information that is clear and relevant to their needs, aspirations and stage in life, especially in today's environment. This means bringing the same level of effort, research and knowledge to marketing efforts that is applied to researching, producing and growing products.

If you think targeted marketing is not critical to the produce industry, think again. The competition is not just the rival grower/shipper across town or from that "inferior" growing region across the country. Fresh produce is up against an entire sweet and salty snack food and industry with billions of dollars in research and marketing resources.

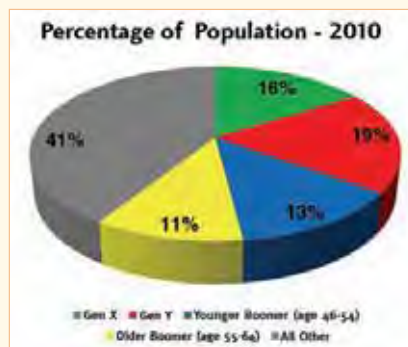
"Produce can't compete toe-to-toe with these types of monetary resources. We have to be smarter, more targeted and more efficient with our resources," says Steven Muro, president of Fusion Marketing.

The produce industry can create an advantage with consumers, extend resources and increase its return on invest-

ment by utilizing a micro-targeting strategy. The industry can use its strengths to know customers better and get closer to them than the competition in the packaged/snack food industries. But how? By dissecting Baby Boomers further, we can discover how to apply a micro-targeting strategy aimed at this group of consumers.

Who Is "The" Boomer?

According to the latest research from NPD Group, there are two very different segments of the Boomer generation. Young Boomers are those age 46 to 54. Older Boomers are 55 to 64 years of age. Below are the percentages of the population made up of boomers:



Younger Boomers

From 2005 to 2010, younger Boomers increased their annual consumption of fresh fruit by 7 percent. Watermelon consumption has nearly doubled since 2005. Bananas, strawberries, pineapple, blueberries and cherries have also experienced notable growth. However, grapes, mixed fruit and nectarine consumption have declined among young Boomers.

Additionally, among young Boomers annual fresh vegetable consumption has risen 8 percent from 2005 to 2010. The leading increases in consumption among young Boomers are green beans, carrots,

onions, lettuce and mixed vegetables, while the largest declines are corn and squash.

Older Boomers

Older Boomers decreased their consumption of fresh fruit annually 5 percent, from 2005 to 2010. While bananas are the top fresh fruit consumed by older Boomers, consumption has substantially declined over the past five years. A noticeable decline in grape consumption has also contributed to the overall decline in fresh fruit consumption among older Boomers. Tangerines, watermelon and apples are among the fresh fruits experiencing growth in consumption by Older Boomers.

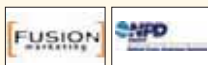
Among older Boomers, the rate of eating fresh vegetable annually declined 4 percent from 2005 to 2010. Specifically, older Boomers have increased their intake of mixed vegetables, peppers and asparagus, while reducing their consumption of corn, cabbage and tomatoes.

Motives and Implications

According to NPD Group research, the top health motivator for both young Boomers and older Boomers is "feeling healthier." Another prime motivator for Young Boomers is losing weight, whereas living longer is high on the list for Older Boomers.

"The research reveals just how differently these sub-sets of a traditionally homogenous group of consumers can be. By applying even these top-line findings, marketers of fresh produce can generate real and measureable results. Further research into Boomers and other important consumer targets can yield even deeper and richer results for businesses in the produce industry," Muro concludes.

Promotions related to weight loss should be targeted toward the young Boomers, whereas the older Boomers may be more interested in messages related to maintaining health longer.



Fusion Marketing is a Los Angeles, CA, based marketing and market research firm specializing in the produce industry since 1997. NPD Group is a Port Washington, NY-based consumer research firm that has been tracking and reporting consumer food and beverage habits and trends since 1980. For more information, contact Steven Muro at steven@fusion-mktg.com or peter.chung@npd.com.

Opportunities In Using New Technology

BY JIM PREVOR, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, PRODUCE BUSINESS

There is little question that marketing becomes more effective as it becomes more specific. That a group such as “baby boomers” spanning almost 20 years should not be homogeneous is hardly surprising and that marketers who don’t segment are bound to be less effective than those who do is almost surely correct.

It is not even clear that age is the most important segmenting that can be done. After all, Bill Gates is a boomer and so is some unknown African-American welfare recipient living in the projects in downtown Philadelphia. One doubts the key variable between these two people is that they have a 10-year gap in between their birthdays.

An even bigger issue when it comes to produce marketing may be the common assumption that because people express an aspiration — healthy living, weight loss, long life, etc. — they will be receptive to marketing messages focused on these issues. Without a doubt, some subset of the population will be influenced by such messages, but our experience is that many will not.

You can see this in other industries as well. Take travel. A correlation of this aspiration for a healthy life would be exercise and fitness, yet resorts and cruise lines find it useful to promote a promise of indulgence and a hint of sex appeal, rather than a strenuous workout.

The question is this: When people say they want to be healthy, do they mean they want to diet and exercise to keep their cholesterol down or do they mean they would like to take Lipitor so they can eat and exercise as they like? Judged by the millions on Lipitor and similar drugs, the weight of evidence leans toward the latter.

Fresh produce marketers have another dilemma; even if marketing for health reasons is persuasive to consumers, it is not clear that fresh can really get the benefit here. Under its purview, the Fruit & Veggies — More Matters program includes fresh, frozen, canned and 100 percent juice. This

is because the relevant government authorities have refused to declare fresh more beneficial than alternative forms of produce when it comes to health.

As the quality of frozen food has improved, household sizes have gotten smaller, and everything from world travel to The Food Network has diversified the types of produce people eat. Consumers of all ages are interested in having produce of all types available day after day — without the risk of it going rotten. This leads to increased interest in frozen product.

We would be cautious in accepting survey results at face value when it comes to consumption. Consumers know that vegetables are the Gold Standard when it comes to healthy eating and so may ‘guilt the lily’ in reporting consumption.

One area where Steven Muro is clearly correct is that the produce industry needs a new, more targeted marketing approach. For all of living memory, the primary marketing tool for the produce industry has been the weekly retailer best food day ad or circular.

Yet as newspapers have gotten weaker and more expensive, this tool becomes less effective. Many younger people don’t subscribe to newspapers at all, relying instead on free content on the Internet. Clearly, both retailers and their suppliers need new ways to reach consumers.

In some cases this is just a matter of switching media — advertising on popular Web sites and blogs in addition to, or in place of, the traditional newspaper ads. With new publications springing up every day optimized for PDAs such as the iPhone or tablets such as the iPad, these opportunities are ever expanding.

Another powerful tool is to use social media such as Facebook and Twitter to interact with the community. Each retailer and vendor can, and should, also have their own Web sites to reach out directly to consumers.

Technology today, though, is creating opportunities that simply didn’t exist before.

With the correct code on the produce, the wave of a PDA can bring the consumer into direct contact with a producer and with the producer’s story. Frequent shopper cards become a much more powerful tool when the data gathered leads to special e-mail and in-store offers.

It is silly for produce vendors to try to be Coke or Pepsi, but new technology is allowing individual vendors and their retail partners to reach out to consumers more consistently, more effectively, with more personalized offers. Instead of advertising “all you diabetics out there,” now we can gather special needs information when people sign

One area where Steven Muro is clearly correct is that the produce industry needs a new, more targeted marketing approach.

up for a frequent shopper card and target offers specifically to families with a diabetic or a school-age child living in the household.

We also can far better judge the effectiveness of our promotions if we go to those baby boomers participating in a frequent shopper program and do a controlled experiment. Offer half just a fruit and a lecture on health; give the other half a fruit and some dark chocolate dip with a promise of indulgence — we won’t know the results until the study is done but, survey results notwithstanding, we can’t recommend betting against chocolate.

México

ADVERTISEMENT

BEST QUALITY AT THE RIGHT MOMENT – GRAPES FROM MEXICO!

When you want to be first with profits, look at Mexico and Sonora spring grapes, available during April/May, June and July. The growers of the Hermosillo and Caborca regions of Sonora and their U.S.-based marketing offices have teamed up to ensure your customer's favorite Spring grape varieties are harvested, packed and shipped, on time, with the upmost care.

During the past few seasons, total pro-

duction of grapes from Sonora has reached 12 to 16 million 18 pound boxes per year. Additionally our producers have recently expanded their plantings, committing more of their land and resources to increase volume during critical weeks, when no other fresh grapes are available.

Available varieties include Perlette, Flame, Sugraone, Red Globe and Black Seedless as well as other varieties under development.

AVAILABILITY

VARIETIES	MAY				JUNE				JULY			
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Perlette												
Flame												
Sugraone												
Red Globe												
Black Seedless												

A COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

High technology and new production systems in vineyard, along with good climate conditions allow for the production of table grapes with an excellent flavor and appearance. Sonora Grape Growers commitment to the customer's needs is proven every day of

the season through a variety of custom packs. More than 98% of Mexican table grape exports come from the state of Sonora.

All shipments to the United States are inspected by the USDA and must be at least US#1 to fulfill the required minimum standard of quality. Fruit is inspected and graded for sugar levels, color, cluster size, berry size and defects. The spring Table Grape produced in Sonora, Mexico, normally exceeds the minimum standards of quality (US#1). In an average year, over 75% of Sonora Table Grapes are graded as "US fancy.

One hundred percent of the Sonora table grape vineyards are certified in Mexico Supreme Quality, México GAP, and "Good Agricultural Practices" by Mexico's interna-



Location: The area of production for the "desert grape" is a tropical climate which is optimum for production and ensures our commitment to quality.

tionally recognized programs and organizations. The United States Food and Drug Administration continuously inspect and test our shipments at rates well above those for U.S. producers to ensure that table grapes comply with all FDA microbial

and chemical regulations.

Table grapes for export from Mexico are produced in only two regions in Sonora that are isolated from other growing regions in the rest of Mexico and the United States by

large mountains, deserts and seas. This isolation means that there are fewer pests, allowing for significantly reduced use of pesticides.

Eating grapes can be promoted as a smart health move to customers. People think of grapes as a fun snack or kid's food but everyone benefits from their nutritional qualities. One serving of grapes (1 1/2 cups) provides:

- 25% of the daily requirement of Vitamin C.

SIGNIFICANT BENEFITS

- And serves as a source of fiber, Vitamin A, calcium and iron.

Resveratrol, found primarily in the skin of grapes, has been found, in preliminary studies, to fight breast, liver and colon cancer. As well, resveratrol is believed to help reduce heart disease.

Sonora's grapes fill the "gap". As customers catch spring fever and look to the fresh products of summer, Sonora grapes can be promoted as the first fresh product of the season.

Insight from Mexico

An interview with Juan Alberto Laborín, general manager of ALPUM (association of grape producers) in Hermosillo, Sonora, MEXICO

Q: What is the most important thing buyers should know about Mexican Grapes?

A: We are the first option of fresh grapes grown in the Northern Hemisphere. And, the quality of our grapes is outstanding due to the highly qualified skilled labor from the Mexican people and of course, the Sonora Desert.

Q: Has Mexican grape production and exports increased in recent years? If so, why?

A: Production has been stable and export volume has been about the same. The big difference is that Mexican Grapes are going to at least three new countries every year, adding more than 25 countries last year!

Q: What can you tell buyers about the quality and safety of Mexican Grapes?

A: Quality and food safety are essential in the Mexican Grape industry. This crop

has been grown by well educated and environmentally-conscious agricultural business men. All Mexican Grapes are inspected by USDA; and at least other nine government agencies have the right to inspect them for quality and food safety, among others. We have all kind of certifications, like Mexican Federal SENASICA, Mexico Supreme Quality, Mexico GAP, SQF and Global GAP, just to mention some of them.

Q: What would you say demonstrates the Mexican grape producers' commitment to the US market and the US buyer/consumer?

A: Mexican Grapes have been on the shelves for U.S. consumers for more than 35 years — that shows confidence and product trust.

Q: How can US buyers better support their Mexican suppliers? What can buyers and suppliers/producers do together to better market Mexican grapes?

A: Mexican grapes offer world class quality. We are ready to prove it. I think buyers are already supporting us and we appreciate it very much. We have been growing constantly in volume and the number of stores handling Mexican grapes; grapes have proved to be within the top three more profitable fresh items in store. Good promotion on the quality, food safety, environmental commitment and of course social responsibility of the Mexican grape industry as a whole would add to our success.

Q: What is in store for the future of the Mexican grape industry?

A: We expect bigger shelf-space. We are improving year after year in each aspect of our product, including safety, packaging, logistics, service, varieties and of course, quality commitment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact the Agricultural Office at the Embassy of Mexico :

HECTOR CORTES

Agricultural Attache

(202)728-1727

Hcortes.sagarpaua@verizon.net

1911 Pennsylvania Ave NW • Washington, DC 20006



For more information on the Mexican grape industry, please visit www.aalpum.com.mx



Reality Check For Locally Grown Advocates: Economics Don't Measure Up

FROM JIM PREVOR'S PERISHABLE PUNDIT
03.28.2011

Our extensive discussion of the “local” phenomenon has included an exchange regarding procurement policies at UC Davis. The key issue, as we saw it, was not that UC Davis elected to adopt some policy. People and organizations do things for all kinds of subjective reasons — reasons related to aesthetics or simple personal or organizational preference.

The issue was that factual statements were being made to support these policies and that the many experts at UC Davis were not standing up to rebut these assertions. Some of the assertions were substantively related to produce...that locally grown product was always more tasty, more healthy, more kind to the environment, etc. Since none of this is proven, and much of it is almost surely false, we argued that advocates for locally grown were using these claims as cover to further their own policy preferences.

We argued that if UC Davis or other procurers wished to increase flavor, safety or reduce environmental impact, these organizations would be advised to procure specifically based on these standards, not use “locally grown” as a proxy for these attributes.

We were also concerned that the economic claims being made regarding the benefits of buying local were not only unsupported by the evidence but were, in fact, clearly contradicted by well established principles of economics. Our series started with a piece based on a panel discussion at the PMA Foodservice Conference, which was moderated by two UC Davis faculty members, one of whom is an agricultural economist. We put the matter this way:

Both Dr. Hardesty and Dr. Feenstra are highly intelligent and very knowledgeable people, but they seem to suffer from excessive politeness. When panelists went off on wild tangents to proclaim idiosyncratic versions of macroeconomics as if they are accepted gospel, they stood silent. For example, when one panelist started to wax poetic

about the importance of not shipping money to Chile and praising the importance of keeping money cycling in a local community, one would have thought a trained economist like Dr. Hardesty would have raised her hand to speak up for the principle of comparative advantage. Yet she stood silent.

We went on to explain that this kind of thinking would wind up making us all poorer. Here is how we put it:

Obviously, nobody is opposed to UC Davis sourcing locally; if the least expensive source for produce that meets all UC Davis criteria happens to be local, of course the school should buy it. But on what basis can the school either raise the meal plan cost, tuition or get more money from taxpayers so it can buy more product within 50 miles rather than less expensive product 100 miles away? This is completely unclear.

And what is the point? The UC Davis Web site says the point is: “To support the livelihood of growers, producers and processors of our regional community.” But this is just another version of Beggar thy neighbor policies. So UC Davis will support its local community, and UC San Diego will support its local community and Cornell will support its local community and Michigan State its local community — and when we are all said and done, we will be much poorer, because instead of producing things where it is efficient to do so, we will buy things where it is politically correct to do so — and that will impoverish us all.

Dr. Hardesty and Dr. Feenstra wrote jointly in response to the Pundit, but dismissed the Pundit's interest in economics as irrelevant to the situation:

Mr. Prevor must have gotten an “A” in his microeconomics class since he clearly articulated the conventional theories of economics, including that of comparative advantage. Comparative advantage, however, supposes that

markets already exist. The topic that this year's Produce Marketing Association bravely tackled was the emergence of new markets to respond to a burgeoning consumer demand for more local, sustainable and flavorful food.

This was very unclear to us. Economic principles apply to both new and old markets and, in any case, we didn't see selling food locally as a particularly new market.

Now a prominent agricultural economist has passed on to us an article that stated the case well. Written for the Library of Economics and Liberty by Jayson L. Lusk and F. Bailey Norwood, both faculty members in the Department of Agricultural Economics at Oklahoma State University, the piece is cleverly titled, *The Locavore's Dilemma: Why Pineapples Shouldn't Be Grown in North Dakota*:

Oklahoma's government, like those of 45 other states, funds a farm-to-school program encouraging cafeterias to buy their food from local sources. U.S. Representative Chellie Pingree (D-Maine) wants to help; she recently introduced the Eat Local Foods Act (HR 5806) to assist schools in providing local foods in school lunches. From Michelle Obama's White House garden to grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's “Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food” initiative, an agenda has emerged to give local foods more prominence on our dinner plates. Interestingly, no agricultural economist has informed the public that a key claim of local-food advocates — that local-food purchases enhance the local economy — violates the core economic principles taught in every introductory economics class. Until now.

A major flaw in the case for buying local is that it is at odds with the principle of comparative advantage. This principle, which economists have understood for almost 200 years, is one of the main reasons that the vast majority of economists believe in free trade. Free trade, whether across city, state, or

MEXICAN PRODUCE EXPORTER OF THE YEAR AWARD

PRESENTED AT THE AMERICA TRADES PRODUCE CONFERENCE ON APRIL 1, 2011
BY PRODUCE BUSINESS, FPAA AND TPA

Martin Ley

*Excerpt from the speech
by Ken Whitacre, publisher
and editorial director of
PRODUCE BUSINESS*

Meticulous. A stickler for detail. Always looking at the big picture. Leading by example. These are just a few of the ways colleagues, co-workers and competitors describe our first annual Mexican Produce Exporter of the Year. This award, presented by the FPAA, Texas Produce Association and *PRODUCE BUSINESS*, recognizes an exporter who has contributed the most to the industry in recent years.

The members of FPAA and TPA voted overwhelmingly in the selection of this honoree. This is what many have said about him: "He is a stand-out guy for the Mexican industry; a bit of an ambassador for the Mexican agriculture industry, both in the U.S. and Canada. Without question, he stands out among so many others."

Our honoree actually began his career on the fringe of the produce industry. His first job out of college was working for a large U.S. retailer. After four years, a call from a family member with an offer he couldn't refuse drastically changed his life, moving him from Northern California to Nogales.

The challenge – to take a failing distribution business and turn it around. Over the next several years, not only did he make the business profitable through hard work and building partnerships, but eventually grew the business into one of the top two or three of its kind, in terms of volume and quality. Not one to rest on his laurels, he pushed until the company launched its own successful label.

His dedication and hard work is acknowledged by all. A co-worker says: "He leads by example. If you're expected to work 12 or 14 hours a day, it's only because that's how long he's here."

As committed as he is to his company, he is equally or more committed to furthering the industry, and he spends a vast amount of time working with the FDA or other Washington entities on trade issues. An industry colleague reports: "He works at things that benefit the industry as much or more than they do his own company. He's made a true commitment to the entire supply chain and works tirelessly for the benefit of all."

He is credited as having a broad vision. An industry friend says, "As a person, he's 110 percent committed to the overall industry. It's not just about

the hothouse segment or the tomato category or even about Mexico; he works for the betterment of the broad industry. He's involved in a lot of things above and beyond the call of duty."

He has held multiple roles at the FPAA and currently continues as a board member. He has been a member of the CPMA North American Trade Committee since 2004. He has been active in numerous committees of PMA for years, and currently serves on its main board. And, he serves as a member of the Leadership Council of the Produce Traceability Initiative.

An associate relates, "When we were putting together our trade task force, he was one of the first people identified by the industry as someone who would have key knowledge of what goes on not only in Mexico but also with trade in the U.S. and Canada. He's one of our star players, particularly in bringing forward the practical experience in commerce between the three countries. Many have noted that he has the vision of why we need to work together on developing standards for North America and even beyond that to international standards."

Outside of work, his family is his other passion. He is married, with two sons and a daughter. It is well known that he loves being a dad and works hard to make the most of the time with his family. This is emphasized by his statement in his bio referencing his family: "Now, what is *really* important..."

An industry friend explains, "You can see the amount of situations where he'll go out of his way, like traveling at night, to ensure he's home for special events and to be with his family."

Our honoree's drive to excel and achieve the goal, as well as his magnanimous sense of humor, is evidenced on several occasions. First, his camping outside of the U.S. Capitol on a hunger strike during the Salmonella Saint Paul outbreak in 2008. And more recently, during the 2010 PMA Fresh Summit in Orlando, when he and his sons participated in a contest at the Nickelodeon Hotel to see who could put on the most pairs of underwear – he won! (And, as a result, had to parade down a runway to show off his victory.)

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in congratulating the 2011 Mexican Produce Exporter of the Year – Martin Ley, Vice President of Del Campo Supreme.



national boundaries, causes people to produce the goods or services for which they have a comparative advantage and, thus, makes virtually everyone wealthier. Princeton University economist Paul Krugman, who won the Nobel Prize in economics for his contributions to the economics of international trade, called comparative advantage "Ricardo's Difficult Idea" because so many non-economists deny it and are unwilling to understand it. But if people understood comparative advantage, much of the impetus for buying local foods would disappear.

When the tomatoes are ripe and the price is right, we, the two authors, enjoy local food. In fact, we grow vegetables in our own backyards. But, according to some bestselling authors, daytime talk show hosts, celebrity chefs, and the U.S. government, we aren't growing and buying enough. These groups have offered a host of economic arguments to promote the sale of local food — arguments that are fundamentally wrong. The piece goes on to dissect various

quality. If that were not so, there would be no need to exhort people to "buy local." However, we are told that spending a dollar for a locally produced tomato keeps the dollar circulating locally, stimulating the local economy. But, if local and non-local foods are of the same quality, but local goods are more expensive, then buying local food is like burning dollar bills — dollar bills that could have been put to more productive use.

The community does not benefit when we pay more for a local tomato instead of an identical non-local tomato, because the savings realized from buying non-local tomatoes could have been used to purchase other things. Asking us to purchase local food is asking us to give up things we otherwise could have enjoyed — the very definition of wealth destruction.

If we, as consumers, require that our food be grown locally, we cause the food not to be grown in the most productive, least-cost location. When the government encourages consumers to

The truth is that the energy expended transporting food is relatively unimportant. According to USDA-ERS data, consumers spent \$880.7 billion on food in 2006. Only four percent of these expenditures can be attributed to post-farm transportation costs. One recent study indicated that over 80 percent of the global-warming impacts of food consumption occur at the farm, and only ten percent are due to transportation.

After an extensive literature review, other researchers have concluded that "it is currently impossible to state categorically whether or not local food systems emit fewer [greenhouse gasses] than non-local food systems." Minimizing the use of natural resources entails producing food in the least-cost location, which will not typically be local.

The piece goes on to point out that local is not necessarily fresher or tastier or more nutritious. Even when it is, these values are not determinative and that we often trade off one value for another.

The piece ends with a call to economics to speak up:

After an extensive literature review, other researchers have concluded that "it is currently impossible to state categorically whether or not local food systems emit [greenhouse gasses] than non-local food systems. Minimizing the use of natural resources entails producing food in the least-cost location, which will not typically be local.

The local-food movement enjoys broad, fervent support, and politicians have hopped on the bandwagon, but that only makes it all the more important to eschew political correctness and critically evaluate the consequences of local-food policies. Economists are a diverse bunch, but we have a few core principles, two of which are that there is a balance of payments and that there are gains from trade. These universal principles are as timeless as the law of gravity. If politicians and activists proposed to suspend belief in gravity, physicists would not cower. They would resolutely defend reality. So should we.

Unfortunately, all across the country, one finds university after university where local is being mindlessly advocated, with unsubstantiated claims being made of all kinds of substantive benefits. Alas, those who know better see few upsides to speaking out. Even the ag economist who sent it on to us preferred not to be associated with these sentiments, although he clearly believes them to be accurate. But if one ever needs a job in academia or a grant, one is better off being associated with trendy ideology than good economics. That is bad not only for clear thinking, but for the future of our country.

arguments in favor of local. It takes on the idea that local buying is good for the economy first:

Tom Vilsack, the current Secretary of Agriculture, stated, "In a perfect world, everything that was sold, everything that was purchased and consumed would be local, so the economy would receive the benefit of that." Apparently Vilsack believes that we'd be richer if we made our own shoes, iPods and corn. Adam Smith and David Ricardo must be rolling in their graves.

Local food is generally more expensive than non-local food of the same

pay higher prices for a local product when a lower-cost non-local product of equal quality is readily available, it is asking the community to destroy its wealth because the local farmer cannot compete with non-local farms.

If we really want to help local farmers, we'd be better off giving them a donation equal to our savings from buying non-local food. We would have redistributed our income, but at least we wouldn't have destroyed wealth.

The authors then point to the absurdity of thinking something is good for the environment due solely to food miles traveled:



PHOTOS BY TOMMY HULTGREN



H-E-B's store-level "partners" are at the core of executing many of the company's successful sustainability initiatives. From left to right: Justin Ibarra (6 yrs), Belinda Rose-Garza (1 yr), Brian Moore (23 yrs), Gilbert Martinez (18 yrs), Lamar Brown (1 yr) and Nick Tijerina (1 yr).

H-E-B: Partnering For Success

H-E-B's familial tie to its Texan — and Mexican — communities bolsters its sustainability goals and provides a competitive edge. **BY MIRA SLOTT**

When PRODUCE BUSINESS presented its annual sustainability award to H-E-B's leadership team, the executives insisted others within the organization are more deserving and the recognition was misplaced. Family-owned and ever loyal to its Texan roots for more than a century, the company operates under a bold collaborative philosophy.

In its drive to grow its sustainability platform and commandeer greater market share in its established, yet competitive home turf, H-E-B stakes its success on a wide-range of players:

- 76,000 employee "Partners," many accruing tenures spanning 20 to 30 years and beyond



'Building a future on a past steeped in history' is what's written in a brochure describing H-E-B's current headquarters offices located within The San Antonio Arsenal, built in 1859. On the steps of the Arsenal's courtyard are representatives of PRODUCE BUSINESS and some of H-E-B's partners. Left to right: Mira Slott (PB), Bill Reynolds (H-E-B), Ken Whitacre (PB), Winell Herron (H-E-B), Jim Prevot (PB), Hugh Topper (H-E-B), James Harris (H-E-B) and Susan Ghertner (H-E-B)

- Minority companies H-E-B engages and enables through its supplier diversity program
- Long-term relationships nurtured with small to mid-size local farmers
- Numerous charitable organizations H-E-B actively supports in giving back to the communities

- Ethnically varied consumers, who have developed an unusual affinity for H-E-B's customized approach. "My H-E-B" is a common phrase shoppers in H-E-B territory proudly use to reference the store closest to them, entertaining their connection to the partnership mentality.

One of the largest independently owned retailers, the 330-plus-store chain reaches some 6 million customers per week in 150 communities purposely concentrated solely in Texas and neighboring Mexico. H-E-B banners include Central Market, H-E-B Plus!, Mi Tienda and Joe V's.

As a privately held company, H-E-B is unfettered by the pressures of producing short-term gains to appease stockholders. The company capitalizes on its flexibility to experiment with emerging technologies, take risks

and innovate in all realms of the sustainability puzzle. For H-E-B, the strategy is a give-and-take of guiding and being guided to balance the mosaic of people, profits and planet — a challenge its many partners welcome.

Produce: The Common Thread

H-E-B's sustainability principles plant produce at the core. Fresh produce, in many ways, defines H-E-B's identity, according to Susan Ghertner, director of environmental affairs. "Produce is who we are," she says, pointing out that fresh, local and sustainable were driving principles at the company years before the concepts became fashionable.

H-E-B promotes its mission to offer consumers an abundance of high quality, fresh fruits and vegetables tailored to their needs, which threads into its sustainability strategies: bolstering local farmers, connecting and giving back to the community and keeping it in Texas and Mexico.

Targeted For The Long-Term

What are the roots that differentiate H-E-B from others and enable it to do the things it

does so well? Two notable factors spring out: the first is being privately held, the second is its unique position as the only retailer of its scale and size to operate exclusively in one state and across the border in Mexico. Its familial tie to its Texan communities bolsters its sustainability goals and provides a competitive edge.

"One of the primary features of our company is the long view, and that supports our partners; it supports our stronger business case to be sustainable as a business model, and it supports the community," says Hugh Topper, group vice president of fresh procurement and merchandising.

This attitude extends toward dealings with suppliers. There has been a lot of change among many retailers in the way they procure in the produce industry, reacting short-term to the tremendous pressure to finagle the most competitive price. These fleeting deals raise concerns about the long-term vitality of the produce industry, as growers need to have the financial wherewithal and confidence to reinvest and expand their facilities, while modernizing to

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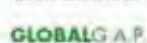
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"One of the primary features of our company is the long view, and that supports our partners; it supports our stronger business model and it supports the community."

— Hugh Topper
Group vice president of fresh procurement and merchandising

keep up with the latest food safety and production techniques.

"When we are working with suppliers today, we have conversations about needing them as much as they need us," says Topper, adding, "H-E-B recognized that years and years ago — before I joined the company — that we want to have great relationships with growers and farmers."

From the beginning, there have been local growers that H-E-B has helped finance to get their businesses started, Topper notes. "We have conversations with growers about what we might be doing that has a negative impact on their business and they give us open honest feedback," he says. There are areas where H-E-B can make changes and sometimes areas where it cannot because of the need to stay competitive in the marketplace, but "having an open conversation with suppliers about what is driving cost in their business and things that they want to do to be sustainable within their organization and understanding how we can support that has been a strong goal of ours," he emphasizes.

Small farmers are not always well capitalized; it could be risky for them to plant 20 acres of okra because if they do not have a home for that product, they are going to be in big trouble. "In certain instances, we have strategic partner relationships where we say, 'If you grow X crop for us, we will take 100 percent of your capacity,'" says Topper. "I get to work with growers and farmers and be a part of that lifestyle, and I love the freshness of that," he says, noting how he draws from his strong agricultural roots and 29 years in the produce business, including almost 19 years at H-E-B.

"We sit down with these local suppliers



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Part of H-E-B's locally grown efforts extends to the company's outdoor garden centers, called Texas Backyard, where many of the plants and foliage items are grown in Texas. Partners at the Texas Backyard section of the H-E-B Plus! store at Stone Ridge Market in San Antonio are (left to right): Steven Valencia (6 years), Brandon Janes (6 years), Brian Milner (1 year) and Jennifer Floyd (5 years)

and talk about their crops and the various yields coming in. They even give us granular information: 'We are planning to rotate the crops and get nutrients back to the soil.' So that actually does take place, but there are safeguards, and we cannot over-promise to everyone," says Topper.

"In some of the localized markets, we have regional produce buyers who really work with small suppliers to build relationships," says Topper. "They do the forecasting and they

sensitize the stores that when growers show up at their backdoor, they are welcome as family members, and for the most part, stores already know them. They go to school with their kids, they sing in the choir together. If they have a pallet or a truckload, they can go to the backdoor. Certainly it does not make sense to drive it all the way to one of our distribution sites in San Antonio or

Houston and turn around and ship it back out for small quantities. But if they are moving in a truckload, those opportunities do exist."

Embracing Diversity

H-E-B's supplier diversity program in its simplest form is really enabling small and minority companies to engage in contractual business or service relationships with H-E-B, preferably locally, explains James Harris, director of supplier diversity. "Ninety percent is done with Texans because we are a Texas-based company, and over 50 percent of that is actually done with women," he says, pointing out that H-E-B was founded in 1905 by a woman, Florence Butt.

Often, small vendors confront barriers breaking into a larger chain, such as burdensome financial requirements including millions of dollars in liability insurance. "We lower those barriers and even the playing field," says Harris. "We do require certificates of insurance, but the policy is not that exorbitant. As long as they follow good agricultural practices, we end up being in a very good place."



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Putting the finishing touches on a pepper display is Adrian Ortega (2 years), who works at the H-E-B Plus! store at Stone Ridge Market in San Antonio.

A strong educational outreach effort opens communication between H-E-B and potential suppliers and those farmer-partners wanting to reach new plateaus. "We provide them that opportunity to get in front of the decision-makers and the buyer, and we make sure they complete all the paperwork and are ready to do business," Harris continues.

"Our reward is that we can create opportunity for a company to do business with

H-E-B, and that partnership can really change their life and their family's life, and those in their surrounding neighborhoods," adds Harris. "These changes fuse back into the communities that we serve. So it is full circle."

H-E-B's minority business outreach involves a robust partnership with the Texas Department of Agriculture and its extension offices in five different regions throughout the

state. Harris rolls up his sleeves and hits farms across the state with a guy he and local farmers affectionately call "Big Mac," who, in more formal circles, is known as Edward McGowan, marketing specialist at the Austin-based Texas Department of Agriculture.

"He is about 6'4" or 6'5", 280 pounds and knows every farmer around. He actually goes out pitching to farmers on what crops to plant based upon what is indigenous to the area and when to actually plant it," describes Harris. "When we do those local outreaches, I call Big Mac and say, 'Let's go on the road; let's do a road show.'"

According to McGowan, who is stationed in Houston, when H-E-B is buying local, it is boosting economic development, creating jobs, bringing product and people in and helping the community. "I'm not supposed to be biased, but H-E-B thinks along those lines. I have a special place in my heart speaking on behalf of James and his work at H-E-B," admits McGowan.

"When producers grow for a chain store, a better deal from Florida can come in and that retailer will drop them," McGowan continues,

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"but H-E-B, and people like James look out for the local farmers and will find a place for them. James will make sure it happens."

Empowering Local Farmers

One only needs to speak with local growers working with H-E-B to grasp the depth of the chain's commitment to the environment and overall corporate social responsibility. [To respect proprietary relationships, growers' identities have been protected.] "In my history in the produce world, I've been with a lot of different chains, including Wal-Mart, and nobody is better than H-E-B in supporting the local grower," says one local farmer in the Winter Garden area, who has significantly expanded his business and prospered by partnering with H-E-B for 14 years.

H-E-B helped guide the cabbage and onion shipper to branch out into growing other products to fill voids in the chain's local assortment. "We're a family business started by my grandfather," says the farmer. "We're not the farmer with 20 acres and a pick-up truck delivering to H-E-B, which the chain also welcomes, and we're not the size of Fresh Express in California. We do about 4,000 acres of produce a year," he says.

"H-E-B is very good at being loyal," he continues. "A lot of chain stores will leave you for weather or quality issues until next season. H-E-B understands that, and as soon as you're ready, they'll come back to you," he says, adding, "They don't try to beat up the local farmers with pricing

One only needs to speak with local growers working with H-E-B to grasp the depth of the chain's commitment to the environment and overall corporate social responsibility.

because they want long-term relationships and know they have to support us over time to keep us in business."

Another grower who supplies a variety of

vegetables to H-E-B from various regions south and west of San Antonio, agrees. In the farming business many generations, the grower started his deal with H-E-B about 11 years ago. "We grow for a couple of chain stores, but H-E-B is our baby," he says. "We can count on them and they can count on us. I began with almost nothing, just over 20 acres, and now have at least a couple thousand acres exclusively for H-E-B," he says proudly.

"HEB is No. 1 to me, and really cares. The team works very well with us on supply issues. 'At Easter time, will we be good on green beans?' they will ask us. The buyers really understand weather issues and ask us to let them know if it looks like we're getting into a gap, so they can turn to Florida or other places to fill in supply," he continues.

While other chains get bogged down in layers of bureaucracy, H-E-B can react on a dime. "All they ask for is three- or four-day's notice. That's where H-E-B whips everybody's butt. H-E-B can react in 24 hours, where the big chain stores have to go through five different people," says the grower, who keeps exclusive acreage for H-E-B, knowing that the chain will remain good on its word and help

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him out in challenging times.

"If I have oversupply, I call the corn buyer, 'I'm in trouble... I'm going to have 15,000 boxes of corn staring me in the face in a week.' The buyer reassures me, 'Just keep me informed and we'll run a 40-store ad and clean your corn up.' No other chain store can do that. It takes two weeks to get an answer back from the other guys," he emphasizes.

H-E-B was having a shortage of local products in certain categories. It went to

the Winter Garden shipper and asked if he would be willing to work with H-E-B in building a broader assortment. "We wouldn't have several product lines if not for H-E-B, and a big portion of those go to the chain and support the local deal. In times where we have good supply and weather cooperates, we'll supply 75 percent of their needs on that item. We know H-E-B will be there to buy 60 or 70 percent of those items so we don't have to worry about our livelihood. We don't have to try and sell to other places

when we are over," he says. "I can pick up a phone if I have different items, or a local farm near me has something else, and the buyer at H-E-B will try it and support the buyer at the local community."

Even if H-E-B has to pay the farmer more, they'll do it to support the deal, according to the Winter Garden farmer. From advertising and promotions to working with individual stores on special merchandising programs that may include a visit by the grower, H-E-B makes a point this product comes from a local farm, he explains.

"H-E-B does a lot locally, not just for sales, but also shows the community who these farmers are and helps consumers understand the whole supply chain and the growing issues we face. Consumers see produce has a place in this area from a labor standpoint, a water standpoint and an environmental protection standpoint."

As far as food safety is concerned, H-E-B has instituted a comprehensive program. "From the start of our relationship," says the Winter Garden grower, "they came to our facility, testing critical control points and working with us, and from there it evolved into a whole system. To be an H-E-B supplier, you need to be certified and get third-party audits. You also must go through an educational food safety training program specific to H-E-B, which includes Best Practices for food safety and sustainability long-term for our area." The grower describes his experience: "With other chains, it's my way or the highway, but H-E-B takes more of an educational approach and works with local growers to get them up to speed.

"We were already doing these food safety requirements, but some of the small growers learn from H-E-B what needs to be done. They guide you," says the south/west San Antonio grower. "When you're a little local farmer, you get nervous when you get a call from Hugh Topper, but fortunately, I've always been recognized for a job well done."

In Your Backyard

Locally grown also extends to H-E-B's outdoor garden section, called Texas Backyard, a unique subsection of the supermarket that features many plants and foliage items grown in Texas.

"We've Got Texas Roots," displayed on a prominent welcoming sign, parlays a familiar H-E-B theme, figuratively and literally. The concept maximizes specialized knowledge of the Texan terrain, highlighting unusual plant varieties and informing customers on how to

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RECYCLING BUY-IN

Any major green initiative requires top leadership support, but to really gain momentum, you have to have the bottom-up groundswell and take a very grass-roots approach, according to Winell Herron, group vice president of public affairs, diversity and environmental affairs.

To generate passion at the store level for recycling initiatives, H-E-B is formalizing a program to identify a green champion for each store, not only to communicate and educate partners on internal strategies, but to elicit partner ideas, feedback and spawn a surge of support at the local level.

Cross-disciplinary sustainability teams function very closely together on any project the chain undertakes to make it happen, explains Susan Ghertner, director of environmental affairs. "If it's composting, we have leaders from produce, from the stores, from procurement, from environmental affairs, and then also what's critical, getting store partners involved."

"With the economic volatility of the last few years, we have really put the pedal to the metal on recycling, minimizing waste and our impact on the environment because it's smart, not only because it's the right thing to do," says Herron. But from a business standpoint, it generates revenue for our company and gives a great return on investment.

H-E-B's early embrace of Returnable Plastic Containers (RPCs) depended on its broad, interdisciplinary cost/benefit analysis, as well as visionary thinking,



Reverse Logistics' Charles Barba (14 years), warehouse coordinator; Ted Lechner, (37 years), manager; and Maggie Hernandez (14 years), environmental project leader, stand next to a recycled-materials statue of mascot H-E-Buddy.

according to Bill Reynolds, group vice president of facility alliance. "When RPCs first started moving forward in the industry, everybody looked at this as a cost. But we looked at packing product in an RPC versus a corrugated box, functioning better in the cooling system, generating less trash, spending less labor hours going back to the compactor, and now I'm able to keep more of our partners in the produce department."

"Another eye-opener was our ability to reduce shrink. Getting buy-in from suppliers required showing them what could happen to their product after spending all this loving care to grow it," he explains.

RPCs get cleaned and reconditioned next door to H-E-B's bustling, centralized recycling facility, also known as the Reverse Logistics facility, where the motto, "We Do Everything Backwards," written on its front door, celebrates the task of taking products back to their beginnings.

Last year's recycling numbers tell the story: H-E-B recycled over 303 million pounds of materials in 2010, according to Ghertner. "Total recyclables have increased by 11.5 percent compared to 2009, and we continue to add more commodities each year," she says.

"Produce recycling is big," says Maggie Hernandez, environmental project leader. Every produce pallet has a corner on it, and composites are not good for recycling, she says. Her plea to the produce industry is to redesign pallets to eliminate composite materials that are not environmentally friendly. **pb**



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care for them.

According to Brandon Janes, manager of the Texas Backyard at the HEB Plus! store located at Stone Ridge Market in San Antonio, "Product has to be native and hardy to survive that strong Texas sun and 100-degree heat," he says, noting the advantage of cultivating relationships with growers in the area.

Employee Partners

The concept of "locally grown" is equally important to H-E-B's internal operations as it is to its external suppliers. Partners mirror the makeup of the community. This commitment to hiring flows through the company. "We make a conscious effort to have partners reflective of and connected to the diverse markets in which we compete," says Harris.

The other hat Harris wears is the diversity hat, and that is focusing on the workforce and marketplace. "If you have people in management and in the store who understand the culture and speak the language, it breaks down barriers and enhances the shopping experience," he explains.

"You have to know your market, or it comes off disingenuous," continues Harris. "We have 11 diversity counselors strategically placed in all of our regional markets to educate partners on product handling and drive awareness upward on cultural nuances so we do not offend anyone," he says, adding, "We also do diversity training. It does not mean you are able to teach diversity, but that you have a working understanding of what it means so if someone wants to engage in a diversity conversation, you do not have to run away from them; you can actually embrace it, and it puts everybody in a more comfortable position."

Partner Empowerment

H-E-B empowers its employee partners through incentivized health and wellness programs, as well as innovative educational/leadership classes that create an energetic work ethic but also a more balanced, happier life, according to Leslie Sweet, public affairs director for the Central Texas region.

Partners actively participate in sustainability initiatives and devote hours of their weekends volunteering in charitable community events, adds Sweet. "We have personal conversations with our partners for every dollar donated. This way, H-E-B allows store partners to take charge of funding to support charities that are dear to them. At the same time, H-E-B is diligent to vet the organizations to ensure the charities are solvent and above board with their services," Sweet

assures. For example, "We have a partner with an autistic child, and she was organizing a walk for Autism. H-E-B lent financial support and resources for the event, and the effort motivated 40 more partners to join the walk, stimulating awareness to help the cause, while creating new collaborative friendships.

"Our partners have their fingers on the pulse of folks in Texas," says Winell Herron, group vice president of public affairs, diversity and environmental affairs. "We have corporate initiatives that run across all of our

stores. We have regional community outreach initiatives that are focused on particular market areas and then we have very targeted grass roots initiatives store-by-store, looking at what matters to our partners and what people care about in their community," says Herron, adding, "It's not just about writing a big corporate check."

H-E-B builds a powerful synergy between its partners, suppliers, customers and the community, the foundation for award-winning sustainability. **pb**



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PHOTOS BY TOMMY HULTGREN

Low wattage lighting, reusable signage, concrete floors and locally grown produce are among the many sustainable aspects of the H-E-B Alon Market store in San Antonio. Displays are being merchandised by produce manager Bobby Wojcik (partner for 16 years).

Store Level Sustainability

Where no two stores are alike, "My H-E-B" is not just a slogan. **BY MIRA SLOTT**

Continually adjusting to demographic shifts, H-E-B focuses on highly tailored product assortment and how each store is designed and merchandised. H-E-B frowns on a "peanut butter approach," says James Harris, director of supplier diversity.

"There is a tendency over the years for large chains to put in stores that are really the same no matter where you go," says Bill Reynolds, H-E-B's group vice president of facility alliance. "There is a value there on economies of scale, but it does not really fit each and every neighborhood.

"At HEB, no two stores are the same; in fact you will see very different looking stores, from the physical presence to customized formatting and assortments depending upon the demographics. Merchants tailor the store so that everything is customer- and community-centric. I think we have a real strength there," says Reynolds, adding, "I work with Hugh Topper and the team on layout... Produce is our calling card. We have

While walking through two LEED-certified stores in San Antonio, it becomes obvious that partner input is an integral part of the sustainability movement.

it upfront to make a first impression, and it also has to have flexibility to adapt to seasonal and product changes and set the tone for the customers of that shop."

Adds Hugh Topper, group vice president of fresh procurement and merchandising, "One of our mottos is, 'We buy Texas first,' so we work hard with large to mid-size to small growers to deliver. First and foremost is getting everyone aligned with our strategy on what we want to accomplish from a merchandising perspective.

While walking through two LEED-certified stores in San Antonio, it becomes obvious that partner input is an integral part of the sustainability movement. One clever merchandising idea epitomizes a multifaceted solution that marries people, profits and planet. As a starting point, many produce displays use Returnable Plastic Containers (RPCs), notable in itself, as H-E-B was a pioneer of RPCs — one of the early adopters on a chain-wide basis when there was a lot of industry resistance.

These streamlined RPC display racks are resourcefully designed for rear loading, which increases efficiency, uses less space and keeps aisles clear for shoppers, explains Bobby Wojcik, produce manager at the LEED-certified, but traditional H-E-B store at Alon Market.

The merchandising concept goes one step further in looking out for the well being of H-E-B's partners. Ease of loading lightens the workload and the back pain. "We're also converting to banana box pods, so we don't have to bale cardboard or spend money on a display fixture," says Anna Chandler, region merchant of produce and floral. "Pods are flexible and easy to set up. The display looks like a farmer's market, puts focus on the product and our customers like it," she says, noting that the team is working on translating the concept to other produce items.

In addition, "We're transitioning out of our



Four-year partner Dylan Petterson demonstrates a rear-loading display of RPCs at the Alon Market H-E-B store.



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When Mike Moynahan, distribution asset design and procurement, came on board, Charles Butt, H-E-B's Chairman and CEO, had just taken over the reins. According to Moynahan, "Charles really is a person who aspires to greater heights, challenging those throughout the organization to follow his lead: What can we do to make our systems superior, raise safety standards, and become faster, more efficient, more competitive and more sustainable?"

Whether it's navigating changing federal and state transportation regulations, improving driver safety, designing more proficient/ergonomic trucks, tackling cold chain issues or forecasting fuel options, H-E-B takes it on, all within a sustainability mandate.

To be truly sustainable, it has to be economical, says Bobby Greene, director of fleet maintenance. "I personally think electric is more efficient, but it's not efficient now."

"Very little — some 20 percent — of our Houston fleet runs on alternative fuels," adds Moynahan. "We have had up to half our fleet in Houston that was on biodiesel before, but the quality levels are not consistent. It has to be at least as competitive." H-E-B has since set up a pilot program in



H-E-B's forklift fleet is powered by hydrogen fuel cells. According to Bobby Greene, director of fleet maintenance and partner for four years (in background), H-E-B will soon attempt to power its refrigerated diesel trucks with hydrogen.

Houston, where it is testing liquefied natural gas.


What really holds potential are hydrogen fuel cells, according to Greene. "We've been given the opportunity to try products and they do work, but not without problems," he says. H-E-B, for example, is creating its own hydrogen. "We were the very first retailer to launch fuel cells in a forklift fleet," contends Greene.

"We generate our own hydrogen reformed out of natural gas. It's not an economic gain but it is a break-even," he acknowledges. "It was a doable program, although we had lots of bugs to begin with, but now it's up and running. Eventually, we want to power our refrigerated diesel trucks with hydrogen, take the diesel engine out and put a fuel cell in. It would be simpler, easier and safer than fueling your car," says Green.

"H-E-B is way ahead of the curve on fuel cells," says Green, "but we're not quite there yet. It takes time to get all the kinks out. Our goal is to replace all batteries with fuel cells." In the interim, H-E-B has installed high frequency charges in batteries to boost power and reduce labor demands.

Moynahan relishes the learning process. "We've dramatically changed how we do business because of the culture at H-E-B," which allows its partners to experiment with new technologies, and take chances to gain sustained leverage."

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"We must always remember that our partners and our products and the services around those are what we offer. Customers need good prices, and the fact is, if we do not manage our cost well, we cannot support those demands."

— *Bill Reynolds*
Group vice president of facility alliance



Twenty-one years as a partner, Anna Chandler, region merchant for produce and floral, spends much of her time looking for ways to enhance displays while finding efficiencies and better ways to lighten partners' workloads.

wasteful paper signage in the produce department and the rest of the store, and converting to reusable, efficient signage that merchandisers can flip," adds Mike Willis, general manager of the H-E-B Plus! LEED-certified store at Stone Ridge Market.

Another sustainability win is moving to concrete floors from linoleum, which are easier to clean with fewer chemicals, while being more durable, according to Chris Clutter, engineering design manager, design and construction.

"We've gone to a continuous dimming system on some of our more recent stores so that it is not as abrupt or noticeable to the customer," says Reynolds. "We wanted to make it more transparent and something that is not a distraction.

"We must always remember that our partners and our product and the services around those are what we offer," Reynolds emphasizes. Using less energy, for example, is a really good consumer cost model. "Customers need good prices, and the fact is, if we do not manage our cost well, we cannot support those demands."

Behind The Scenes

That strategy pursues all aspects in the sustainability journey, with an unyielding push to cut out waste, reduce energy, alleviate inefficiencies and innovate both business savvy and environmentally friendly solutions.

"Being a supermarket, we use a lot of energy through refrigeration, high-intensity lighting and air conditioning required to keep the humidity out," says Joe Lopez, H-E-B's

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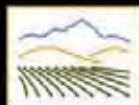
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energy manager, who focuses on demand-side management in stores, distribution centers, manufacturing facilities and warehouses.

"H-E-B spends a lot of money on not just electricity, which is a big part of the pie at an overwhelming percentage of the store's operating cost, but we still spend quite a bit on water and natural gas. So my job is to help reduce our energy consumption, which goes right to the company's bottom line," he says, adding, "Electricity is a huge expense; I think it is No. 3 behind labor and rent."

Lighting retrofits, which Lopez calls the low-hanging fruit, reduced wattage 41 percent. "With over 200 lights on average per store, we saw a four to six percent reduction in our total electricity use, in addition to lowering maintenance and labor costs. But the benefits translate to the produce department as well, improving color rendition and visual appeal on the retail floor," says Lopez. One added benefit of new lighting is that those higher wattage fixtures generated more heat, which was bad for produce.

Open cases in stores use a significant amount of energy to keep products cold. For stores that are not open 24 hours, night blinds keep the cool air in the cases for a two to six percent reduction on the meter, but also lead to less shrink, Lopez explains.

In the pipeline, H-E-B would like to install LED lighting in refrigerated cases throughout the store, says Lopez, noting, "We have tested some in produce cases here in town." One advantage of LED is lower energy, but the really big advantage is much lower maintenance. However, there are challenges in cold climates in keeping their full brightness. H-E-B is also testing innovative air-conditioning technology that reuses existing water condensation.

Water is a big issue, albeit still relatively cheap when prioritizing initiatives, says Lopez, noting challenges in the hot Texas weather. Many variables impact alternative energy results, he explains, noting that experiments with solar power still only amount to one percent of H-E-B's total annual consumption, and wind energy purchases requiring a bigger upfront investment are a hedge. "We are hoping that over the life of the purchase, there is a kind of breakeven point," he says.

"We are very open to trying new things," says Reynolds. "With research and development, some things work, some things do not, but there is a willingness to explore what makes sense."

From the partners on the front lines to the partners at headquarters, everyone at H-E-B seems in sync with this strategy.

pb



Greenhouse-grown produce includes peppers and tomatoes, among other items.

Merchandising For Year-Round Greenhouse Sales

Focusing on a few basic merchandising points will keep greenhouse sales going year-round. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

Once seen as an expensive niche, greenhouse items now occupy consistent space in shoppers' carts due to availability, quality and affordability. "The greenhouse category has been on a continual pattern of growth since the late 1990s," says Jim DiMenna, president of Jem-D International Partners LP, based in Leamington, ON, Canada, which has farms in Canada and Mexico. "Our retail partners are still experiencing double-digit category growth and we've barely scratched the surface at food-service levels."

"Greenhouse production in Mexico has been increasing strongly," states Alberto Maldonado, general manager for Nogales, AZ-based Apache Produce Imports LLC. "In the early days, greenhouse produce had a specialty niche because it was sold at a premium. With increased production volume — sometimes even more than open field — we now have promotable volumes on a lot of items."

Opportunities are still ripe for increasing greenhouse product sales. "Greenhouse products have not hit their top level yet,"

acknowledges Dick Stiles, director of produce and floral for Redner's Markets Inc., a West Lawn, PA-based retailer with 39 stores. "The customers are the ones who are driving sales with greenhouse products. Quality is very good and cost has come down. Right now, it's a great commodity to put out there and promote."

"Sales continue to grow as more and more people are convinced of the food safety, taste, appearance, quality and year-round availability differentiation of greenhouse product," explains Mike Reed, president of BC Hot House Foods Inc., in Vancouver, BC, Canada.

"Greenhouse items are becoming more common because of availability," concurs Raul Gallegos, senior director of produce and floral for Bristol Farms, a 13-unit chain headquartered in Carson, CA.

By focusing on some simple merchandising principles, retailers can boost greenhouse sales. "Retailers are making a real investment in the greenhouse category," says DiMenna. "We are seeing some very exciting programs being executed at store level. Whether it's investing in margin, grouping multiple greenhouse items together in 'family ads,' or running 5-for-\$5 or

10-for-\$10 ads, retailers are doing a lot to ensure the growth of the greenhouse category."

Merchandise Throughout Various Categories

Although many refer to the greenhouse "category," it may be better described as an offering of products in various categories in the department. "We look at greenhouse products throughout different categories," explains Stiles. "Tomatoes are in the tomato category, peppers are in pepper section and so forth."

"We don't call attention to greenhouse or field-grown specifically," says Gallegos. "We tie all the items in a category together. For example, in tomatoes we just label them as extra large or vine-clustered."

"Displaying greenhouse next to open-field is a great way to introduce customers to the greenhouse product," adds Stiles. "Especially now that the price has come down, consumers can really begin to consider it since the price difference isn't as much."

However, retailers should be cautious not to lose profit if items are priced differently. "Be sure not to mix up greenhouse with open-field

“Selling peppers by the unit has resulted in category growth because it takes the guess work out of the cost at the register. If greenhouse peppers and cucumbers are part of a 4-for-\$5 ad, consumers are more likely to purchase one of each. This grouping encourages increased sales and repeat purchases.”

— Jim DiMenna, Jem-D International Partners LP

in display and check-out,” advises Apache’s Maldonado. “If there is a significant price difference and greenhouse items are mistaken for open-field, you may be losing profit.”

Optimizing the display of greenhouse items will optimize sales in turn. BC’s Reed explains, “Peppers and cucumbers can be put on slanted, dry shelves, especially during ad weeks. Waterfall effects work well with cucumbers. Tomatoes can be piled high and cross-merchandised with avocados and/or basil to promote companion usage.

Get The Word Out

Advertising the quality and consistency of greenhouse products will stimulate sales. “We advertise greenhouse products more and more every year,” reports Redner’s Stiles.

“Themed greenhouse ads, multiple displays and value-added items, such as 5-lb. beefsteak boxes and bagged peppers, help grow the category,” adds Reed. “BC Hot House is adding distinctive labels to our specialty tomatoes that highlight the growers as well as recipe ideas.”

Ad frequency also plays a role in driving sales. Jem-D’s DiMenna explains, “We used to see ad frequency once per month on a greenhouse SKU. Now, many of our retail partners run at least one greenhouse item in their ads 40 to 45 weeks per year. Consistency in quality and 52-week availability is the driving force behind the frequency.”

Retailers can promote environmental and sustainable aspects to consumers. “There is a great opportunity in what the more updated greenhouse facilities do behind the scenes and how they benefit the environment,” says Gallegos of Bristol Farms. “If we can get that story across it’s a big plus. It also shows the customer that the retailer is sensitive to these issues and working with suppliers who are sustainable or environmentally conscious.”

“To ensure continued growth, the industry needs to keep educating the consumer regarding the positive attributes of greenhouse grown,” states Reed. “These issues

include sustainability, yield, food safety and locally grown.”

Focus On Value

Pricing methods may vary among retailers and individual situations, but the focus should remain on value. “I think we’re giving the customer a good value with by-the-pound pricing,” contends Stiles. “If we have smaller sizing, then it doesn’t cost extra if the customer buys smaller items.”

“Pricing depends greatly on product, sourcing location, weather, availability and other factors,” adds Gallegos. “Our method changes depending on the price point. For example, \$1.49 may sound better for an item than 2-for-\$.X. We make decisions based on the commodity and the specific factors at the time.”

Consistency of quality and availability in production have enabled more flexibility in pricing and promotion. DiMenna explains, “Tomatoes on-the-vine and beefsteaks are primarily sold in bulk by the pound. Jem-D’s 12-month production supports many 99-cent promotions. We used to see 99-cent TOVs or beefsteak ads run from April through August. Today, we can support them just about any week of the year. Cucumbers and peppers are being sold at retail level by the unit more than ever before,” he adds. “Selling peppers by the unit has resulted in category growth because it takes the guess work out of the cost at the register. If greenhouse peppers and cucumbers are part of a 4-for-\$5 ad, consumers are more likely to purchase one of each. This grouping encourages increased sales and repeat purchases.”

“Value-added bagged items continue to see increased sales as consumers reach for three peppers and a guaranteed ring-through for the retailer,” reports Reed of BC Hot House. “May to October and January through March are ideal ad time frames. Flat-line pricing across specialty tomatoes, or all three colors at the same price, has also helped to increase sales and trial.”

Use Recipes And POS

As with most products, recipes and POS information will promote purchases. “Recipes and POS are always welcome,” says Gallegos. “They’re a valuable tool to help in sales of any product — the more information and education the better.”

Retailers can look to their suppliers for promotional support. “We work very hard to develop and grow new varieties, so it’s our responsibility to provide information to consumers emphasizing the product’s attributes,” states DiMenna. “We invest heavily in recipe demo programs with our partners. We work closely with retailers, discuss our collective growth targets and create a plan specifically tailored to achieve our common goals. Social media campaigns are also on the rise. We are getting involved with a growing number of retailers now on Facebook, Twitter, and other networks.”

Increase Cross-Promotion

“Cross-merchandise greenhouse peppers in the meat aisle as a stir fry ingredient,” recommends Redner’s Stiles. “Greenhouse tomatoes can be promoted all summer long with hamburgers for grilling or salads. Items can also be promoted in an ad with an Italian theme. You can combine greenhouse tomatoes, peppers, pasta, olive oil, Italian bread and garlic.”

Offering meal solutions using a combination of greenhouse items increases ring. Jem-D’s DiMenna explains, “In our Tuscan pizza or pasta applications we’ve collaborated with pizza crust, pasta, sauce, olive oil and cheese companies to create healthy and easy-to-prepare meal solutions.”

Promote Quality, Every Day

Retailers should be cautious to ensure all greenhouse products are at their prime. “Greenhouse and quality are synonymous so you want to maintain that in your display,” warns Stiles. “It’s so important not to push products out before they are ready. Watch displays and remove any products that are past their prime. You’ve got a good premium product that customers want so you don’t want to damage it.”

“Greenhouse can present more security for retailers,” says Apache’s Maldonado. “If handled right, the shelf-life is longer and the quality is better. That’s what makes the difference for the store and for the customer. Look at what happened in February in Sinaloa. All the open-field product was almost lost. Greenhouse production had some damage, but not significant losses. That’s the difference a greenhouse can offer.”

pb



The Hunts Point Produce Market with Star Boxing's FIRST ANNUAL AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY'S KNOCK OUT CANCER: JULY 23, 2011



If you are like most Americans, cancer has touched your life or the life of someone you not only know, but love. The statistics are sobering. Cancer remains the second largest leading cause of death in our country, claiming more than half a million lives each year. That is one life lost to cancer every minute! The lifetime risk of developing cancer is as high as one in two for men, and one in three for women.

That is why on **Saturday July 23, 2011, Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association** is proudly partnering with the American Cancer Society to host the 1st Annual **KNOCK OUT CANCER** boxing fundraising event. Net proceeds from **KNOCK OUT CANCER** will support the American Cancer Society's efforts in research, advocacy, education and services.

KNOCK OUT CANCER is the first event of its kind; Joe DeGuardia, Founder & CEO of Star Boxing is a veteran in the boxing world, and a Bronx native. Star Boxing produces exciting, innovative, and professional boxing events. Star Boxing has consistently brought credibility, integrity, and exciting fights world wide. This event is taking place at the Market and promises to be a memorable experience for all of us.

The **KNOCK OUT CANCER** sponsorship opportunities outlining a variety of levels of participation and amenities can be viewed online by visiting www.huntspointproducemkt.com. If you have any questions about **KNOCK OUT CANCER**, do not hesitate to contact *Myra Gordon*, Executive Administrative Director of Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association via email at maggehuntspoint@aol.com or *Yilda V. Guerrero*, Director of Special Events, American Cancer Society at **718-547-5064 x 2101** or via email at yilda.guerrero@cancer.org.

Please join us by supporting the American Cancer Society in the fight against cancer.

TOGETHER WE CAN ALL MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Sincerely,

Hunts Point Terminal Produce Cooperative Association.

Where the Farmers Go To Market



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & CONSUMER SERVICE
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



State ag departments collaborate with retailers to capitalize on the demand for homegrown produce.

State Departments Of Agriculture: The Harbingers Of Locally Grown

Continuing to focus on 'buy local' programs, state departments work hand-in-hand with retailers to shine a light on their state's bounty. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**

What's old is new is true, not only in fashion, but food. Witness the centralized buying and 52-week sourcing that followed mass retail consolidations a decade ago and the move back to regional seasonal procurement as consumers clamor for locally grown produce. When behemoths like Bentonville, AR-based Wal-Mart Stores do it, it's clearly more than a fad. The world's largest retailer announced in October, 2010, that it planned to double sales of locally grown food by 2015, and in the United States, would source produce from states and regions with long-standing histories of agricultural production. Wal-Mart and other retailers' plans to focus on locally grown produce have state agricultural department personnel cheering and rolling up their sleeves to help.

Rick Wright, category manager for produce and floral at TOPS Markets LLC, a Williamsville, NY-based chain, reveals, "We've worked with the Pride of New York program for the past four to five years. Today, our homegrown program has

reached a point where we buy from more than 200 farmers in the state, everyone from the big guys to mom-and-pop farms."

Multi-Faceted Programs

While locally grown continues to be a buzz word around the country, in many states, it's nothing new. For example, New Jersey was one of the first to develop a branded advertising and promotional program for its state-grown produce. The Jersey Fresh label was launched in 1983 to market local fruits and vegetables to the Garden State's customers. Al Murray, assistant secretary of agriculture for the Trenton-based New Jersey Department of Agriculture (NJDA), says, "We've survived a major budget crisis and the program has evolved as the locally grown trend has exploded. Farmers have received newfound respect and the number of farms in the state has increased four percent between 2002 and 2007, although the average farm size has decreased to 70 acres."

Fresh produce is only one feature of many state agricultural marketing programs. Tim

Pezzolesi, manager of marketing and promotion for the New York State Department of Agriculture & Markets (NYSDAM), headquartered in Albany, NY, reports, "Pride of New York started in 1997 and was limited to fresh produce, but today, it includes other agricultural products grown or processed in the state."

Similarly, South Carolina's Certified SC Grown brand is seen on fresh produce, as well as beef, rice and barbecue sauce, details Martin Eubanks, director of marketing for the Columbia-based South Carolina Department of Agriculture (SCDA). "We rolled this program out in 2007 and fresh produce is a big part of it. We have 40 to 50 different items with product diversity increasing each year to include different types of greens, herbs and sweet onions."

Retailers, as well as foodservice operators, distributors, wholesalers and ultimately consumers, are among the targeted partners of state agricultural promotional programs. Gary W. Black, agriculture commissioner of the Georgia Department of Agriculture (GDA), located in Atlanta, GA, points out, "The GDA



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“The GDA established the Georgia Grown strategy in 2000. In 2001, retail and consumer pilot programs started with 149 Kroger supermarkets and grew to include other chains throughout the state. Participating supermarkets feature a Georgia Grown section, along with recipes for creating meals using those products.”

— Gary W. Black, Georgia Department of Agriculture

established the Georgia Grown strategy in 2000. In 2001, retail and consumer pilot programs started with 149 Kroger supermarkets and grew to include other chains throughout the state. Participating supermarkets feature a Georgia Grown section, along with recipes for creating meals using those products.”

“Three years ago,” adds Pezzolesi, “we hired a full-time employee to promote Pride of New York to local chains. Three major chains signed on the first year. This year, 16 major chains and hundreds of independents work with us to source and promote member products.”

Many retailers have recognized consumer demand for local foods and created their own signature programs. For example, TOPS Market offers its NY/PA HomeGrown program, identified by its trademarked tractor silhouette on a yellow yield sign. This has shifted the role of state personnel from sellers of government-run programs to more broad-based supporters of local agricultural marketing. TOPS' Wright states, “We run our program and the state has been there to support us and help us with our needs.”

Jessica Ziehm, the NYSDAM director of communications, echoes, “Our Pride of New York component is store-specific. We look to complement, enhance, provide resources, contacts and ideas to strengthen retail programs in any way we can.”

As consumers become more educated and interested in the benefits of buying local, they are seeking products that are produced nearby. Thus, state agricultural marketing programs have branched out to network with regional ‘buy local’ programs. For example, Redland Raised is a local branding initiative created by the agricultural manager for Florida's Miami-Dade County, in conjunction with local farmers and the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). Yolanda Roundtree, development representative supervisor for the Tallahassee-based FDACS, reports, “We have worked on this initiative with Publix stores for the past

two years.”

Publix Super Markets Inc., headquartered in Lakeland, FL, kicked off the Redland Raised, Fresh From Florida brand in October, 2009, with an in-store event in one of its Miami stores that featured special displays, along with the new logo on green beans, yellow squash, zucchini, boniato, okra and avocados.

“This year, under the umbrella of Pride of New York,” reveals Ziehm, “we'll be working with regional buy local campaigns such as Finger Lakes Culinary Bounty, Adirondack Harvest and Long Island Grown. King Kullen, for example, has been a great supporter of Long Island Grown.”

Success of agriculture marketing programs is evident in many ways. One is a high level of consumer awareness of state brands and increased purchases at retail as a result. Wendy Lee White, marketing specialist for the Lakewood-based Colorado Department of Agriculture (CDA), shares, “Approximately 68 percent — up from 59 percent in 2008 — of people are familiar with the Colorado Proud logo; 84 percent indicate they purchase at least some Colorado products; and 57 percent are looking for the Colorado Proud logo more often when shopping. Local retailers have been hugely supportive of the program and are using the Colorado Proud logo to promote local products in stores and in their advertising efforts.”

According to sales numbers, retailers who participate in the Go Texan program supplied by the Austin-based Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), “witnessed sales increases of between 200 and 600 percent for promoted commodities,” reveals Richard De Los Santos, the TDA's state marketing coordinator for horticulture, produce and forestry.

Another success is new found markets for farmers. Leah Clark, Idaho Preferred program manager for the Idaho Department of Agriculture (IDA), located in Boise, ID, says, “We hear very positive comments from our farmers that they are gaining access to major retailers



through the Idaho Preferred program that had not been possible before.”

Linking Buyers And Sellers

Matchmaking is an important role of state agriculture departments, or, in other words, assisting retailers in sourcing a variety of fruits and vegetables from local farms. Patrick Mills, produce merchandiser for Sunflower Farmers Markets, a 32-store chain based in Boulder, CO, says, “We opened a new store in Salt Lake City in March. Officials from the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food and Utah's Own program were there, and we had discussions about getting more local products in-store. This is something we do in each of the states where we have stores.”

The CDA is working with Colorado State University to create an online resource to help producers navigate the necessary rules and regulations when selling their products to retailers, restaurants, farmers' markets and other outlets. The information will be available this summer.

Food safety assurance is a requirement of most buyers. To help prospective producers be prepared, Texas A&M Extension developed more than 100 Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) manuals tailored to individual growers' operations with the help of USDA specialty crop funding. De Los Santos describes, “These manuals help growers become GAP-certified and better educated. This effort has expanded to include a curriculum, workshops and a Web site to increase producer knowledge and use of GAP. In addition, TDA will reimburse producers for a portion of the GAP certifica-

tion fees if they complete the curriculum.”

The Internet is also the vehicle for linking buyers and sellers. The CDA's White remarks, “We also offer an online resource for finding Colorado products called Colorado Market-Maker (CMM). This is the one-stop shop for anyone looking for Colorado products, including retailers, consumers, restaurants, schools, etc.” CMM is part of the National MarketMaker system. Currently, 18 states participate in this effort.

Sourcing product is one hurdle; actually getting it delivered to stores can be another, especially for small farmers. “In Idaho,” says Clark, “some growers are using a produce distributor to distribute their products to local retail stores. Others deliver their produce directly to stores with their own trucks and are co-opting with other smaller growers to deliver their products at the same time.”

The TDA's De Los Santos adds, “Many retailers have changed their purchasing and procurement guidelines to allow for direct delivery to a local grocery store chain.”

“TOPS will take store-door delivery on items such as corn, squash and beans,” according to Wright. “We'll even work with small producers that might have one or two commodities available for two to three weeks and can only supply one store.”

Farm tours and food shows coordinated by state agricultural departments are one way retailers can learn about new producers and buying locally grown produce on an annual basis. “For example,” says Dan Strasser, director of market development for the Nashville-based Tennessee Department of Agriculture, “Each year for the past six years we have sponsored a bus that takes 45 to 50 retail staff on a one-day visit in July to three to four farms.”

Mike Tipton, director of produce and floral operations for Food City, located in Abington, VA, participates in something similar. “We may visit farms that grow corn, beans, tomatoes and maybe blackberries,” he says. “We rotate the farms each year and we rotate who goes: produce managers one year, assistant produce managers the second and store managers the third. This hands-on tour in the middle of the season gives staff an opportunity to talk with farmers directly, and they often communicate this back to customers at the store.”

Talking with farmers can be an eye-opening experience for desk-bound produce staff, acknowledges TOPS' Wright, who works with the NYSDAM to host an annual meeting and farm tour that typically takes place the second week of June. “We have two groups — morning and afternoon — tour the farms. This

type of opportunity gives our produce staff a great appreciation for what it takes to get product to market.”

This past winter, a record 118 and 102 agricultural producers attended food shows in Charlotte and Raleigh, NC, respectively, as part of the Goodness Grows, Got to be NC marketing programs, according to G.W. Stanley, marketing specialist for the Raleigh-based North Carolina Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services. “These events are invitation-only and targeted to retail

decision makers. The goal is to showcase farmers and processors, especially the smaller ones that have limited marketing funds.”


Ag Programs In Action

There are several ways state agricultural programs and retailers are partnering in-store.

POINT-OF-PURCHASE AND SIGNAGE: Banners, price signs, danglers and pictures of farmers and product signage that lists the grower, county and state are used to identify local product in Food City stores, according to Tipton.

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"We'll use, for example, the Pick Tennessee on products like strawberries and tomatoes, Kentucky Pride on melons and Virginia's Finest for items we get from Virginia like apples, cabbage, squash and broccoli," he details.

"King Soopers did a great job in 2010 of promoting Colorado Proud products in their stores, especially in the produce section," acknowledges the CDA's White. "They created a signage program that was very successful."

More than 500 retail stores used POS signage provided by the SCDA last year, reports Eubanks. "Last year was the first time we provided channel strips that allowed retailers to call out products grown or made in state in produce as well as grocery, bakery and deli. This year, we've gone one step further and are producing special signage to bring attention to some of our most important crops such as melons, peaches and sweet corn."

Also new, the Sacramento-based Buy California Marketing Agreement, which oversees the California Grown program, will roll out a new campaign that features bios and in-field photography of some of the state's farmers. Maile Shanahan Geis, executive director, reveals, "In-store floor graphics and grocery cart placards will be available with images of the farms and farmers. These will be used in Safeway, Vons and all Save Mart stores."

SPECIAL DISPLAYS: Tennessee-grown strawberries are featured in big displays at Food City stores, notes Tipton. "We'll run a display contest with the berries in our stores in May. The displays will be front-and-center and staff will wear Pick Tennessee shirts during the promotion," he details.

Up to \$5,000 in marketing funds — \$3,500 for fresh produce and \$1,500 for value-added products — is available as a grant from the

"TOPS will take store-door delivery on items such as corn, squash and beans. We'll even work with small producers that might have one or two commodities available for two to three weeks and can only supply one store."

— Rick Wright, TOPS Markets LLC

NYSDAM for retailers who want to initiate or enhance their buy local programs. Price Chopper Supermarkets, a Schenectady, NY-based chain, is one retailer that received this grant and used it to buy special step shelving to display Pride of New York member products in 26 of its stores.

ADVERTISEMENTS: Paul's Markets, an eight-store chain based in Homedale, ID, feature local produce in their print ads each summer, using the Idaho Preferred logo to call out local items in the flyer and to identify products in-store. "In addition," says IDA's Clark, "owner, Stan Zatica, filmed a TV ad where he is shown picking apples in a local orchard and promoting Idaho Preferred product."

"In 2010, late season Fresh from Florida labeled strawberry ads run by Publix and other retail partners turned a potential loss into a gain for Florida berry farmers," says Dan Sleep, development representative supervisor for the FDACS. "A January freeze delayed the crop, and Publix's willingness to run ads longer and later in the season resulted in historically high cash receipts of \$367 million. At the same time, we supported Publix's efforts, as well as our other retail partners, with Web-based and other types of advertisements for Florida strawberries."

DEMOS: The TDA's De Los Santos details,

"This winter, Go Texan partnered with retailers across the state to conduct citrus promotions and in-store demos that encouraged consumers to purchase Texas grapefruit and oranges and make citrus salsa for Super Bowl."

Additionally, this summer, the TDA, in partnership with the Texas Vegetable Association, will provide recipe cards developed by Houston chef, Molly Fowler, to retailers across the state for in-store demos from May through August. Vegetables featured on the cards include sweet onions, baby spinach, flat-leaf Italian parsley, cabbage, baby yellow squash and corn.

IN-STORE FARMER'S MARKETS: Instead of losing sales to farmer's markets, some retailers have recreated this type of market in-store, such as the Manahawkin, NJ, location of BJ's Wholesale Club, a chain headquartered in Westborough, MA. The NJDA's Murray shares, "For the first time, during a weekend this past August, shoppers were treated to a farmer's market-like spread of produce from local New Jersey farmers in the store's parking lot. Shoppers were able to pay \$3.99 for a box that had a bar code, and then they were able to fill the box with their choice of Jersey Fresh produce. The promotion was a phenomenal success."

Also last summer, Boise, ID-based Albertsons, scheduled rotating farmer's markets events at stores within the state. Clark of the IDA notes, "Wissel Farms, a local producer and vendor to Albertsons, brought their delivery truck to the stores, banners were hung and produce displays were built to promote local produce — both inside and outside the store. Each store hosted a promotion at least once during the summer, and all stores hosted promotions during Idaho Preferred Month in September. In addition, Idaho Preferred supported the chain's farmers markets with radio ads recorded by actual farmers supplying produce to Albertsons. Sales increases of 7 to 130 percent were reported on featured Idaho Preferred produce during these promotions."

pb



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & CONSUMER SERVICE



PHOTO ABOVE COURTESY OF S. AFRICA CAPE CITRUS PRODUCERS FORUM
PHOTO AT RIGHT COURTESY OF DNE WORLD FRUIT SALES



South African imports into the United States began in 1999 with 50 tons of citrus. This year, more than 41,000 tons were shipped.

South African Citrus: Still A Growing Opportunity

With plenty of varieties to keep consumers' interest, South African citrus provides a wealth of options to the summer produce department. **BY JODEAN ROBBINS**

In a little over a decade, South African citrus has proven itself a quality, must-have item in the produce department. "South African citrus is important to our summer fruit mix," says Dick Rissman, produce director with Dahl's Food Stores, headquartered in Des Moines, IA, an upscale independent chain with 12 stores. "Quality is usually top notch, so it fits in perfectly with our goal to offer customers top quality items."

"Each year, we continue to see consumption levels increase," adds Bill Weyland, vice president of sales at Springfield, IL-based Seven Seas Fruit, a subsidiary of Tom Lange Co. "There is good promotable volume of both oranges and Clementines throughout the season."

The growth trajectory for South African summer citrus has been largely on the rise since it first began arriving in the United States. According to Suhanra Conradie, CEO of the Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF) in Citrusdal, South Africa, "Exports from South Africa began in 1999 with about

50 tons of citrus shipped to the United States. In 2010, more than 41,000 tons were shipped. During the past five years, there has been an increase in Navels, Clementines, Midknights and Minneolas."

"Both the trade and consumers have relied on South Africa for summer citrus for many years," states David Mixon, senior vice president and chief marketing officer of Seald-Sweet International, located in Vero Beach, FL. "If we are market-driven, growth in summer citrus will continue at a very strong percentage. Our growers from South Africa are tuned into the market needs, as opposed to being just production-driven."

South African citrus continues to present opportunity for increased business, adding a different aspect to the produce department, even among a busy fruit season. "It's a competitive time of year because of all the other fruit available," acknowledges Rissman. "But, these products are colorful and fun and add a different dimension to our department. It gives us an alternative during the time period. People get tired of what's in season and want to

see alternatives."

The startup of the summer import season in the United States is dependent on when California citrus finishes. Tom Cowan, South African sales manager for DNE World Fruit Sales, headquartered in Fort Pierce, FL, explains, "Once California fruit finishes, the market opens up to the summer imports from Australia, Chile, Peru and South Africa. South African Clementines are expected to start in mid-June with Navels starting in late June or early July. The season for South African Clementines is early June through early August with the late-season mandarins starting in late August through early October. The Navel season is late June through September; Midknights start in mid-September and go into early November."

The South African deal is built on a foundation of quality and consistency. "South Africa produces very high quality fruit," says Andre van Blommestein, managing director for WP Fresh, based in Somerset West, South Africa. "We comply with the highest USDA protocol in order to get fruit to the United States."

LOOK FOR NEWCOMERS

South African producers continue to develop new and different items. “South Africa is developing some newer late-season Navel varieties, one of which is the Autumn Gold,” states Tom Cowan, South African sales manager for DNE World Fruit Sales, headquartered in Fort Pierce, FL. “This looks promising, and boasts good qualities like better exterior color and a higher Brix level.”

“The Clemengold is a late-season variety of soft citrus that comes into the market August through October,” says Marc Solomon, president of Fisher Capespan U.S.A. LLC, located in Gloucester City, NJ. “It has fantastically high Brix, good flavor and is seedless.”

The newest variety from South Africa is the Star Ruby grapefruit, available June through August. “Grapefruit was imported for the first time last season,” reports Bill Weyland, vice president of sales at Springfield, IL-based Seven Seas Fruit, a subsidiary of Tom Lange Co. “Use waterfall displays to increase visual impact and sample product to the customers.”

“This tasty fruit comes at a time when Florida grapefruit is no longer available

and is an extremely attractive addition to the summer fruit line,” adds Solomon. “The South African grapefruit have a beautiful red blush and the eating quality is exceptional.”

“We are taking a closer look at grapefruit this year,” acknowledges Maria Brous, director of media and community relations for Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets Inc. “This is supposed to be a good year for them.”

While not available yet, a new varietal has been discovered, incredibly, by baboons. Suhanra Conradie, CEO of the Western Cape Citrus Producers Forum (WCCPF) in Citrusdal, South Africa, explains, “Each year, a certain farm had been struck by a troop of baboons descending from the mountains, selecting one tree among thousands in one orchard and devouring all of the tree’s fruit. On inspection, we discovered the sweetness of this particular orange was much higher and was ready for harvest earlier than expected. We’re now duplicating shoot graftings. After what may take several years, we may have the fruit accepted for export.” **pb**

“There is opportunity for South Africa to expand in the U.S. market with the late-season Mandarin varieties like the Clemengolds and Honeygolds. Both these varieties have excellent exterior skin color, are easy to peel and have excellent taste. These late season Mandarins are growing in popularity in the United States and the shelf-life is usually better than the earlier Clementines.

— Tom Cowan, DNE World Fruit Sales

Work The Variety

Retailers who know and optimize the variety available from South Africa will reap rewards. “Consumers have become educated about citrus, and they crave variety so retailers should not assume they have the category covered by stocking only one variety,” advises Marc Solomon, president of Fisher Capespan U.S.A. LLC, located in Gloucester City, NJ. “A wide range of varieties is available with different appeal, and retailers should carry a good mix. Carrying multiple varieties and highlighting them for the consumer adds excitement to the category.”

“As the season progresses, the summer citrus from South Africa transitions from the popular Clementines to the Navel oranges to Midknights and Clemengold varieties,” says Conradie. “There is enough variety for retailers, and ultimately, consumers, to satisfy their needs and taste interests throughout the season.”

Stores may want to especially focus on late-season products. “There is opportunity for South Africa to expand in the U.S.



market with the late-season Mandarin varieties like the Clemengolds and Honeygolds,” states Cowan. “Both these varieties have excellent exterior skin color, are easy to peel and have excellent taste. These late season Mandarins are growing in popularity in the United States and the shelf-life is usually better than the earlier Clementines. Also, South Africa’s late season Valencia-type Midnight oranges have done well in the late September/October period in the U.S. market in recent years.”

“The Clemenule variety of Clementine is the most popular for us,” states Maria Brous,

director of media and community relations for Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets Inc. “We finish the season with a variety called Afore or Clemgold. The most popular Navels are the Washington variety. We start with the Linas and end with the Robyns and Late Lanes.”

Promote To Increase Sales

A little promotion goes a long way with summer citrus. “Promote, promote, promote,” advises Mixon of Seald-Sweet. “Consumers have come to expect summer fruit offerings to include citrus and recognize that the fruit is a little more expensive. They expect to see promotions several times during the summer. Retailers who listen to their consumers will find success in their continued promotional approach to citrus year-round.”

Featuring citrus in summer ads will grow sales. “We have a good program in place and we make sure we run each item in the ad at least once during the season,” reports Brous.

“Increasing shelf presence and ad frequency during these months will have a positive

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“In-store promotions tied to in-store demos have been most effective. Two-for-one peaches and citrus as a tie-in promotional sales event is another great example.

— David Mixon, Seald-Sweet International

impact on the total citrus category,” says Seven Seas’ Weyland. “If ad space in the circulars is unavailable, then use in-store price promotions, manager specials, weekly specials, or featured items to create some additional impulse buys. Retailers can also run some display or sales contests and let the produce managers use their creativity in tying into a South African theme.”

Demos and cross-merchandising are also useful tools. “In-store promotions tied to in-store demos have been most effective,” states Mixon. “Two-for-one with peaches and citrus as a tie-in promotional sales event is another great example.”

Consumers increasingly desire to have a better understanding about the sources of their food selections and this opens another promotional area. “The growers from South Africa have visited retail outlets and talked directly to consumers,” says Conradie of WCCPF. “These visits have been well-received and we are hopeful to bring them again to retail outlets this season.”

“Retailers need to make it available, mark it clearly as South African summer citrus, offer sampling to the consumers right there in the store, include collateral of recipes and information about the fruit and country of origin, and consumers will prefer it,” Conradie sums up.

Think Out-Of-The-Bin

Offering packaging alternatives can also result in increased sales. “Retailers should make a big push on Clementine bags during late June through July,” suggests DNE’s Cowan. “We’ve seen a big movement to the 2- and 3-lb. bags in the retail stores during the summer program because retailers can get to a more attractive price point on the smaller bags than with the 5-lb. box. Last season, we saw retailers promoting the 2-lb. bags at \$2.99/\$3.99 retail and the 3-lb. at \$4.99/\$5.99 retail price points. The 3-lb.

Navel bags also provide a good item to promote during the July/August and early September period."

"Several years ago we started carrying the Clementines in a 3-lb. bag as opposed to the traditional 5-lb. box," shares Brous of Publix. "We felt the lower retail price point was needed to compete with all the soft summer fruit that is available during that time. We might carry the 5-lb. box also, but each year is different in terms of cost and availability."

Offering both bagged and bulk gives customers options. "Offer consumers bulk oranges and bagged oranges at the same time," states Seven Seas' Weyland.

"Several years ago we started carrying Clementines in a 3-lb. bag as opposed to the traditional 5-lb. box. We felt the lower retail price point was needed to compete with all the soft summer fruit that is available during that time. We might carry the 5-lb. box also, but each year is different in terms of cost and availability."

— Maria Brous, Publix Super Markets Inc.

"A good idea is to bag smaller sizes in Navels and Midnights rather than just selling these by the piece," agrees Blommestein of WP Fresh.

New bins available from the South African Citrus Producers Forum are another way to get more product in front of the customer. "The bins are smaller than the traditional watermelon-type bins and allow retailers to display both bulk fruit and bags in the same bin," explains Cowan. "We encourage retailers to use the new bins along with demos on the key items during the peak periods of flavor. This is a good way to drive additional sales in your produce department."

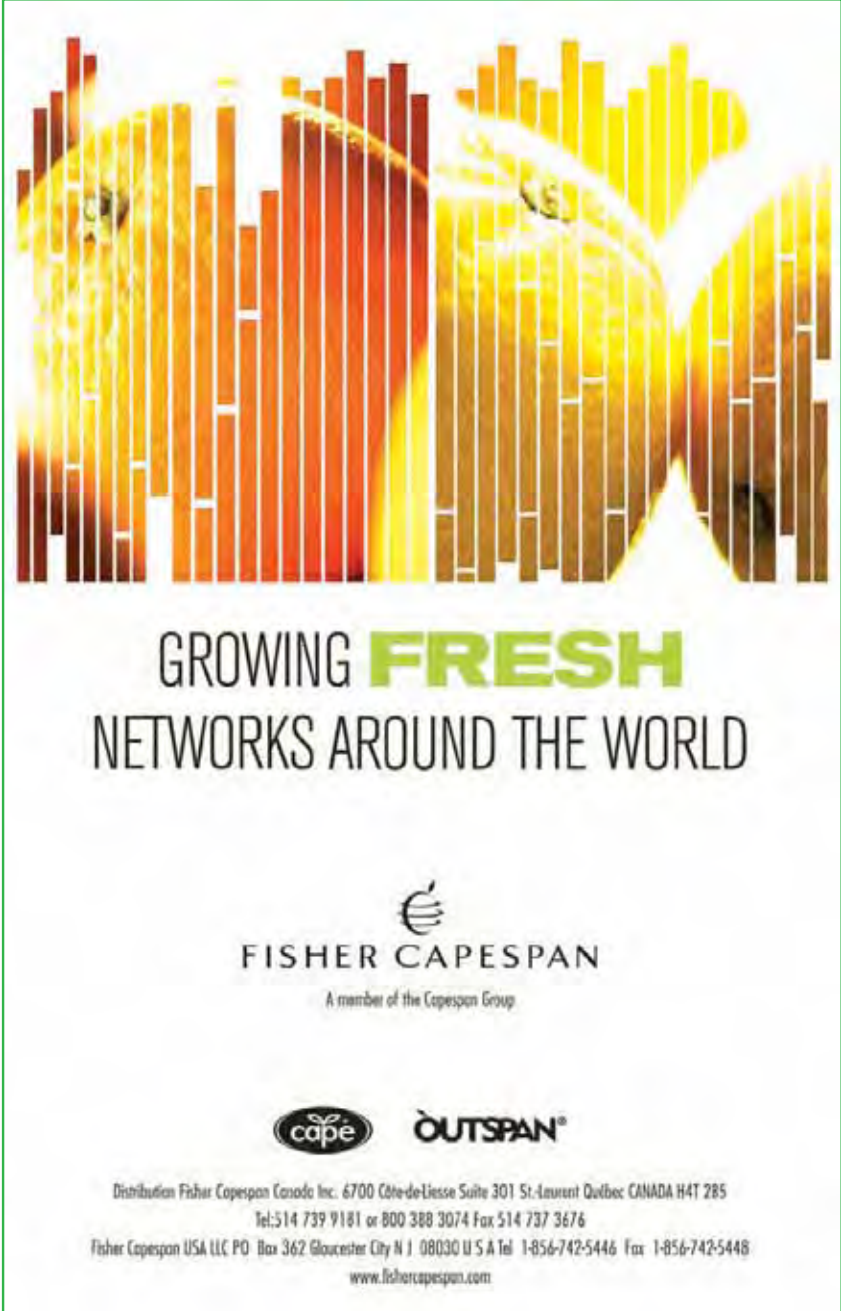
Show It Off

Visible summer citrus will sell. "The main thing is to display it prominently," suggests Dahl's Rissman. "Get it in front of the customers' eyes. There's a market for it, no question about it."


"Commit to giving citrus a good location within the department," advises Weyland. "Don't bury it in the back. Sales are still an impulse buy, and we need to display citrus prominently. If shelf space is limited, use water-


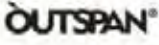
fall displays to create a larger visual impact."

"Build bigger displays of each item with good signage explaining the characteristics of each variety," recommends Cowan. "Consumers buy based on the visual appeal of the items, especially citrus. Signage is important because of all the new varieties of items in the produce department. Highlight the South African citrus in a special section in the produce department so all the different items are grouped together. **pb**



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Whether placing the ripest fruit in baskets or ensuring a two-color banana program, shippers claim ripe fruit sells the fastest.

Taste Is Key In Ripened Fruit Programs

With proper communication and a keen eye on merchandising, retailers can have a thriving ripened fruit program. **BY K.O. MORGAN**

Ripened fruit is when produce is at its optimum tastiness, and keeping it fresh can be challenging for most produce departments. But taste is what drives fruit sales, and one bad apple can lead to a customer ignoring the whole bunch the next time around. “With ripened fruit, consumers see the end result right in front of them. They can feel the pressure, see the color and smell the aroma. It removes the guesswork and uncertainty about whether and how to ripen certain fruits at home,” says Don Goforth, marketing director at Family Tree Farms Marketing LLC, a growing, packing and shipping company, in Reedley, CA.

“Ripe fruit leads to a better consumer experience, which leads to better expectations, which leads to better sales,” says Steve Kenfield, vice president of marketing and business development at The HMC Group Marketing Inc., based in Kingsburg, CA.

“There are no cons to selling ripened fruit, only pros,” states Keith Fetterolf, produce manager at Foodland, headquartered in Lebanon, PA, with 68 units. “With ripened

fruit, you can take it home, eat it right away, or put it in the fridge and it’s already ripe when you want one.”

“Ripened fruit generates impulse purchases of ready-to-eat fruit,” adds Jan DeLyser, vice president of marketing at the Irvine-based California Avocado Commission (CAC). “It creates greater customer satisfaction because it improves consumers’ experiences with the fruit, leading to repeat sales.”

David Byrne, vice president of sales at Thermal Technologies in Blythewood, SC, agrees. “Many of these items are impulse purchases, so having ripe fruit ready-to-eat will drive sales and ensure a consistent and positive consumer experience, encouraging them to come back for more.”

“Consumers don’t know how to ripen fruit properly, so ripened fruit helps consumers have a better experience so they are more likely to make a repeat purchase,” adds Gary Van Sickle, president of the Reedley-based California Tree Fruit Agreement. “If consumers have a bad experience, research indicates it could be four to six weeks before they venture to buy that fruit again.”

Knowing When To Display And When To Remove

Maintaining taste and quality of ripened fruit is a challenge that retailers face. It’s a balancing act between selling a fruit too soon in the game, before taste is at its premium, and selling too late, when the fruit is starting to break down, soften and spoil. It’s knowing when to keep the fruit on display, and how to limit shrink so that costs are kept to a minimum. It’s understanding what temperature conditions are optimal for each individual fruit, and how to handle the produce to minimize damage, and it involves being creative and knowledgeable about ways to increase customer awareness about ripened fruit.

One way to increase sales is to appeal to a customer’s senses — not just visual, but also smell and taste, right there in the produce department. “Research shows that produce tends to be an impulse buy, so displaying fruit that is ripened, colorful, and fresh tends to appeal to consumers when shopping in the produce department,” states Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A. Inc., in Coral Gables, FL.



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"Storing fruit, particularly stonefruit, at improper temperatures is detrimental to the fruit. We put a lot of information on stonefruit about the specific temperatures to hold the fruit in the produce department and hold the fruit in a backroom chiller situation. If the temperature is too cold, it enhances stonefruit on the inside to break down and get mealy. In a backroom chiller, 32-33 degrees is best or above 50 degrees on the floor."

— Gary Van Sickle, California Tree Fruit Agreement

"Ripened fruit generally shows more color and is more fragrant than non-ripened fruit, and what smells better, sells better," says Bil Goldfield, communications manager for Dole Fresh Fruit Co., headquartered in Westlake Village, CA. "A beautiful ripened piece of fruit is more enticing to consumers because it engages the senses, and that pulls in those spontaneous sales."

The trick is keeping the fruit at its best before it starts to break down. "Dessert quality leads to more sales, but the riper produce can also get dehydrated or cause more shrinkage," explains Dick Rissman, produce manager at Dahl's Food Markets, in Des Moines, IA, with 12 units.

"The shelf-life of ripened fruit is not as long, so the trick for retailers is determining what the demand is and how much to keep on hand," advises Sarah Crum, director of operations at Bloomington, CA-based Index Fresh Inc. "If you have too much ripened fruit out, it will sit on the shelf and spoil, which will affect its flavor."

"The risk of shrink is the obvious," agrees Goforth of Family Tree Farms. "Managing ripe fruit categories involves knowledge of traffic flow in the produce department throughout the week, as well as the ripening characteristics of each individual commodity. It can take more time and requires a more knowledgeable produce staff."

Goldfield does not view shrinkage as necessarily a bad thing. "There should be an acceptable level of shrink as part of the process of selling ripened fruit," he acknowledges. "Low shrink would indicate understock and missed sales."

But the CAC's DeLyser doesn't believe that ripened fruit increases shrinkage and spoilage. "There isn't necessarily any added shrink when selling ripe fruit since ripe fruit can increase the velocity of sales — and the number of turns (volume) at point of purchase," she says.

"Our research shows that shrink drops

when selling ripened fruit," reports Kenfield of HMC Marketing Group. It's less susceptible to breakdown than unripened fruit."

Removing The Guesswork Via Ripening Programs

One way to lessen the chances of shrinkage and spoilage is by having a ripening program in place — that is, having a dedicated plan of placement, rotation and promotions. "A ripening program, when combined with promotion, can increase sales velocity and the number of turns of the display, resulting in reduced shrink," explains DeLyser.

"The first part of any successful ripened fruit program is communication with suppliers," asserts Goforth of Family Tree Farms. "Everyone has to know what the retail program is, and how it will be implemented at the warehouse level and at store level, and everyone must work together toward that goal. Next is education of all handlers in the retail distribution channel about the ripening characteristics of the product. Many suppliers and commodity boards have retail training information available on their Web sites, such as the online training program where ripening, handling and merchandising ripened fruits are just part of the curriculum."

The most obvious place to start is with the display in the produce department. "Placing ripened fruit in its own display and making customers aware of that display reduces consumer handling — and thus bruising — of the fruit by taking the guess work away," explains DeLyser.

"Regularly culling their displays is the best improvement retailers can make to ensure their produce department projects the proper fresh image to consumers," says Goldfield of Dole. "The key is for the fruit to look as ripe as possible, while still retaining enough life to allow for some delay in consumption. Consumers look for mature fruit that is

ripening well.”

Placement and size of the display can play a huge role in how quickly the ripened fruit moves. “You want to make sure the product is highly visible and placed with related items that help with merchandising it,” says Dahl’s Rissman. “You want to have a big display, but you don’t want it to be too massive or the fruit will over ripen and you’ll have more spoilage.”

“Build your displays in prominent locations,” advises DeLyser of the CAC, “and then have a second display at the front of the department or at the front of the store or in other produce-related and unexpected areas. Always rotate and refresh displays daily, which helps reduce damage due to repeated shopper handling.”

“The biggest challenge for retailers is finding the right combination of several factors, such as how ripe they want the fruit to be when it goes on display, how many feet to devote to the display, whether to offer multiple levels of ripeness or just one, and how far they are willing to go before they consider the product unsalable,” details Goforth. “Once that combination is found, daily tasting of the products on display should be mandatory to ensure the program is on track with its flavor goals.”

Staying on top of the display also helps to keep the fruit fresh and appealing. “Make sure you keep an eye on fruit breaking down or rotting,” warns Van Sickle of California Tree Fruit Agreement. “Keeping displays fresh will have a higher appeal to the consumer.”

“No matter what, you’re going to have spoilage because of handling, in that customers will throw the fruit around when searching for the right one. So don’t stack your items too high,” Fetterolf of Foodland says.

Christou of Del Monte agrees. “When displaying fruit, retailers should consider placing additional padding in shelves or displaying fruit in single layers to prevent fruit from bruising,” he adds.

Attention-Getting Promotions

Drawing attention to displays through advertising, taste testing and in-store promotions can also increase sales. “One of the best ways to promote your display is through signage,” recommends Fetterolf. “I have good rapport with my customers because I’ve been here 20 years, so I put out signs that say, ‘Keith says...’ when pushing certain ripened fruit. When I put up my ‘Keith says’ signs, the fruit flies out of the store. I also taste test for quality and flavor. When I don’t have any signage up, customers will approach me and say, ‘I haven’t

seen any ‘Keith says’ signs.’ It really works!”

“You definitely want to use signage to call attention to ripe fruit and reduce shoppers’ handling,” says the CAC’s DeLyser. “Also, signs should point out the nutritional attributes of the fruit to communicate messages designed to increase demand and drive sales.”

How the fruit is displayed is equally important. “Moving the ripest product to the front of the display is a very simple step,” notes Goforth of Family Tree Farms. “It could also be moved to a separate basket with a simple hand-written signs that say ‘Ripest Fruit Here.’ Tote bags can be an effective display, but consumers are often skeptical about the condition of fruit at the bottom of the bag. Don’t display ripened fruit in a cello-wrapped tray with a bargain price or you’ll accelerate shrink. Ripe fruit produces ethylene in high concentrations and trapping it in with the fruit drastically shortens any shelf-life it may have left.”

“Provide recipe cards by the display,” advises DeLyser. “This will drive impulse sales and create new usage ideas, which can lead to sales on other items in the department and in the store. Another idea is to put Ripe stickers on the fruit to help customers identify ripe fruit. This has been shown to increase sales by

up to 28 percent.”

“Display different varieties of ripened fruit,” offers Van Sickle of California Fruit Tree Agreement. “For example, displaying peaches, nectarines and plums together will give lift to each and lifts the category and sales.”

“Retailers can also place fruits in end caps and use POS signage throughout the store to further engage consumers,” states Christou.


“An advertised price promotion can also lead to an increase of up to 146 percent in sales,” reports DeLyser.

Cross-merchandising is another great way to move ripened fruit. Holidays, in particular, present opportunities to push product. “Use holidays and special events to build theme-oriented displays that feature ripened fruit in combination with other celebration items such as wine, beer, chips and salty snacks or desserts,” adds DeLyser.

“Cross-merchandising produce in other sections of retail stores is one important way to increase the ability to sell fruits in other departments, such as selling tomatoes in the deli section,” adds Christou of Del Monte.

Taste testing demonstrations can also increase impulse buys. “Fruit at its peak of ripeness is delicious. Sampling and demon-

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strations are the best way to move fruit that is nearing the end of its lifespan," says Dole's Goldfield.

Kenfield of HMC Marketing Group agrees. "We need to re-engage the consumer via demos offering samples," he says. "It's incredibly expensive, but samples encourage the customer to try a particular fruit."

Put A Plan In Place

Perhaps the biggest decision that retailers and produce managers must make is whether to sell only ripened fruit, or whether to offer consumers a variety of ripened, unripened and over ripened fruit.

"I have no statistics on selling only ripe fruit, but according to *Consumer Insights — Understanding the California Peach, Plum &*

Nectarine Consumer, a report published by the California Tree Fruit Agreement, 59 percent of consumers will buy more fruit if the fruit is 'firm with a little give,' while at the opposite end of the ripeness spectrum, 69 percent will buy less if the fruit is hard and 66 percent will buy less if it is too soft," reports Goforth of Family Tree Farms. "But more than 80 percent say that they try to choose some fruit for the next day or so and some for later in the week, so consumers do want a choice."

"I think having ripened fruit as well as not quite ripe allows you to reach more customers because the consumer who is ready to eat that day can shop that day, or the customer shopping for several days later can also make a purchase," says Crum of Index Fresh. "In fact, the California Avocado Commission did a



Pears are often an important part of a ripened fruit program.

study that found that when retailers offered three different stages of fruit, sales increased."

Christou of Del Monte Fresh Produce agrees. "Having ripened fruit available for purchase in the produce department offers consumers the opportunity to purchase fruit

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HANDLE RIPENED FRUIT WITH CARE

Proper handling of ripened fruit is key to reducing spoilage or shrinkage and increasing sales, starting with shippers and suppliers and ending with how the product is handled and stored at the retail level. This involves educating everyone involved in the ripened fruit program.

"Retailers need to educate their employees on the proper way to handle ripened fruit in a way that prevents damage, such as bruising or smashing," says Sarah Crum, director of operations at Bloomington, CA-based Index Fresh Inc. "It's important that the fruit is handled carefully, and that employees do not stack other products on top of it."

"Retailers should pay close attention to how fruit is handled in their stores, particularly in store backrooms," states Dionysios Christou, vice president of marketing at Del Monte Fresh Produce N.A. Inc., based in Coral Gables, FL. "They must educate their employees in order to keep produce looking its best."

Bil Goldfield, communications manager for Dole Fresh Fruit Co., headquartered in Westlake Village, CA, agrees, and notes, "Each commodity has specific requirements, and educating the produce associates as to those particulars involves constant training of produce associates and sharing those basic techniques with others."

"Different items have different Best Practices that need to be employed to ensure proper ripeness and the longest possible shelf-life," states David Byrne, vice president of sales at Thermal Technologies in Blythe-wood, SC. "These Best Practices need to be identified, trained and adopted as standard operating procedures. It has to be systematic to achieve consistent results."

Christou adds. "Following First In, First Out (FIFO) guidelines, using merchandising techniques, and implementing Best Handling practices reduce the opportunity for ripened fruit to have a negative effect in the produce department."

Temperature Counts

"Retailers may place breaking and ripe fruit in a cooler for short term storage, but in general, firm preconditioned fruit can be held at room temperature for three to five days and breaking-to-ripe fruit for two to three days," explains Jan DeLyser, vice presi-

dent of marketing at the Irvine-based California Avocado Commission (CAC). "But do not store hard, unripened fruit below 45° F to avoid chill damage."

"Keeping it refrigerated at the right temperature is extremely important," agrees Dick Rissman, produce manager at Dahl's Food Markets, in Des Moines, IA, with 12 units. "But obviously, if the fruit shouldn't be refrigerated, you don't want to do that."

"Fundamental temperature management of around 36-50 degrees is important when storing ripened fruit," says Steve Kenfield, vice president of marketing and business development at The HMC Group Marketing Inc., based in Kingsburg, CA. "If you handle the fruit like a sensitive item, it makes it less difficult to manage."

"Storing fruit, particularly stonefruit, at improper temperatures is detrimental to the fruit," states Gary Van Sickle, president of the Reedley-based California Tree Fruit Agreement. "We put a lot of information on stonefruit about the specific temperatures to hold the fruit in the produce department and hold the fruit in a backroom chiller situation. If the temperature is too cold, it encourages stonefruit on the inside to break down and get mealy. In a backroom chiller, 32-33 degrees is best or above 50 degrees on the floor. It makes for a better life for fruit at the consumer level."

Rotating the fruit from the cooler to the floor is an important part of a ripened fruit program. "Proper rotation by produce personnel will ensure consumers are getting the freshest fruit available," says DeLyser.

Educating consumers is also important in making sure they receive the optimal taste experience. "I always tell my customers that room temperature fruit is the best flavored fruit," says Keith Fetterolf, produce manager at Foodland, headquartered in Lebanon, PA, with 68 units. "Think about when you pick fruit off a tree — it tastes better. But when you eat it right from the fridge, it loses a lot of its flavor. I tell customers, if you know you're going to eat it tomorrow, put it out the night before. I personally love these tree-ripened Navel oranges. They are so delicious because they're tree-ripened, not picked when green, and so the good orange flavor comes out if at room temperature, but there's not as much flavor if eaten cold from the fridge." **pb**

color and quality right at the warehouse level. Imagine what could happen if the retail practices were consistently optimized as well."

However, the flip side of that is that consumers know ripened fruit requires faster usage and consumption, Goldfield of Dole points out. "For an immediate need that is not an issue, but it does tend to reduce or limit transaction size for fear of spoilage if unused immediately," he says.

Goforth of Family Tree Farms agrees. "If you are choosing to sell only ripened fruit, a consumer may buy only what they can eat in the next day or two rather than buying an entire week's worth of fruit at various stages of ripeness."

Providing various stages of fruit may lead to larger purchases — in the short term. But ripened fruit, at its height in flavor, can mean more repeat sales down the line. "Ripened fruit, if done right, has a longer shelf-life and lower shrink than unripened fruit," asserts Kenfield. "It's easier to handle. Retailers still have to follow the same good practices that they do anyway, but the chain retailer who is doing well is the one who works closely with the supplier, packer and shipper over those retailers who treat all fruit alike and don't care where it comes from. The bottom line is, those retailers who develop personal relationships with their suppliers get the better fruit and thus the better eating experience for the consumer — and that leads to repeat sales."

Help for implementing a ripened program is available for retailers. "Retailers need to know that while a ripened fruit program may seem overwhelming, they are not alone in the process," adds Goldfield. "Dole's Technical Services and Merchandising teams are always available to travel to customers' sites to analyze, train and share the Best Practices in handling and merchandising."

"Del Monte Fresh Produce has allocated many resources to support and educate retailers on best handling practices of ripened fruit," says Christou. "Our best in class merchandising and category management capabilities assist retailers in moving product quickly by implementing techniques such as cross-merchandising, creating appealing displays, promotions and practicing proper product rotation."

"What throws the consumer off is if the fruit is ripe today, yet unripe tomorrow," warns Kenfield. "In other words, their experience is inconsistent. It takes working together. Once that happens, having a successful ripened fruit program isn't that difficult." **pb**

at its most optimal level."

"Having the correct ripeness and quality can increase sales dramatically," asserts Byrne

of Thermal Technologies. "Specifically regarding bananas, I have had my clients report sales increases of 5-25 percent after getting



Southern shoppers look forward to local corn and greens, such as kale and collards, once the season begins.

Southern Splendor

Southern vegetables occupy a treasured spot at the table. **BY JULIE COOK RAMIREZ**

There's just something special about the South. Birds fly south in the winter. College students flock to southern destinations over Spring Break. And Americans often choose to spend their golden years basking in the warm southern sun.

The magic of the South isn't limited to its appeal as a destination. What comes out of the South is just as extraordinary. From sweet potatoes and Vidalia onions to mustard greens, chard, black-eyed peas and kale, southern vegetables possess a certain "je ne sais quoi" that simply cannot be replicated anywhere else.

"People equate the South with fresh, hearty vegetables," says Wendy Brannen, executive director of the Vidalia, GA-based Vidalia Onion Committee (VOC). "They have an innate appeal right off the bat."

It's all about southern heritage, according to Kevin Hardison, agricultural marketing specialist for the Raleigh-based North Carolina Department of Agriculture, as the many eclectic people who congregated in the South learned how to cook the unique vegetables that grow there.

For more than two centuries, food — heavy on traditional southern vegetables — has played a major role in southern gatherings. "When people get together, it's all about the

southern food, whether it's the fried chicken and the greens or the beans," says Martin Eubanks, director of marketing for the Columbia-based South Carolina Department of Agriculture. "Food is what families are all about in the South."

Just what is it about the South that makes it the ideal place to grow such a wide variety of vegetables? Not surprisingly, southern growers say it's all about the weather, as the climate makes for great vegetables. Ashley Rawl, director of sales and marketing for Pelion, SC-based Walter P. Rawl & Sons Inc., calls it a "gift from God." According to Eubanks, the hot, humid growing conditions of the South lead to large volumes of consistently high quality produce.

Meanwhile, Brannen says the mild southern winters allow for the production of Vidalia onions and similar items. "This area is conducive to such an array of good vegetable crops — anything from sweet corn to cabbage," she says.

On Trend

It's a good thing Southern vegetables are so plentiful, as it appears demand is on the rise. Sweet potatoes, in particular, have become incredibly popular, with restaurants frequently offering sweet potato fries or baked sweet pota-

toes as a side dish option. Hardison credits industry groups for working with chefs to make sweet potatoes "ubiquitous in every aspect of food. From sweet potato fries to sweet potato pudding to sweet potato cakes and soufflés, they are working with creative people to come up with new and interesting ways to use a sweet potato," he says. "They are trying to make it synonymous with American culture."

As with so many other culinary trends, many southern growers point toward the Food Network and other TV chefs for turning consumers on to everything the South has to offer. "From Wolfgang Puck to Paula Deen, super chefs have done their part to increase the popularity of southern vegetables," recognizes Adam Lytch, grower development specialist at L & M Companies Inc., headquartered in Raleigh, NC. "It has helped their popularity, no question about it. It's now a chic thing to prepare and serve southern vegetables."

However, the VOC's Brannen contends TV chefs often receive too much credit when it comes to exposing consumers to new trends. She praises retailers for their role in encouraging consumers to step outside their comfort zone and try new things. "We talk a tremendous bit in this industry about the food channels on TV and all the different food shows, but retailers should receive a



PHOTO COURTESY OF K-VA-T FOOD STORES

Southern produce runs the gamut and includes peaches, green beans, tomatoes, sweet onions, peppers and more.

large part of the credit as well," she says. "They are doing a much better job of educating consumers and setting up displays to entice them to try new things and extend beyond that area of comfort."

Specifically, Brannen points to farmer's market type set-ups and higher quality in-store

demos. She likes to see retailers group fresh fruit and vegetables together to "tell a story." The VOC, for example, often works with other Georgia commodities, such as those that promote watermelons, blueberries and or peaches, to promote the fresh produce as a team. She recommends retailers follow suit and

partner vegetables that come from the same state or that go well together in summer dishes — for example, Vidalia onions with bell peppers for grilling.

A Taste Of Spring

Generally speaking, when it comes to merchandising and marketing southern vegetables, it's a good idea to play up the fact that most of them hit stores in the spring. After a long, hard winter, the arrival of such fresh vegetables can serve as a harbinger of spring and a cause for celebration. "It's really when the season begins to change for the Midwest and the Northeast and everybody wants that first flavor of spring and summer," says Rawl of Walter P. Rawl & Sons. "That's what this geographic region can deliver — that late spring/early summer burst of flavor for their palate."

This year, in particular, the harsh winter created the perfect opportunity for southern vegetables to stake their claim as the first sign of spring, and consumers couldn't be more ready for the goods of the season. "Especially this past winter, we had cold weather that affected not only the South Florida deal, but

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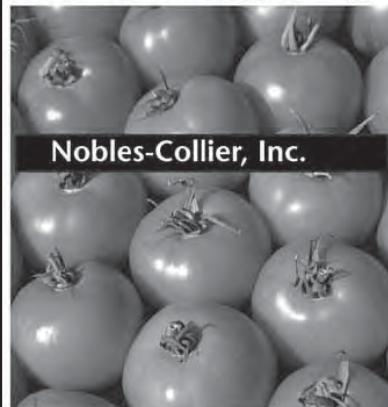
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“We talk a tremendous bit in this industry about the food channels on TV and all the different food shows, but retailers should receive a large part of the credit as well. They are doing a much better job of educating consumers and setting up displays to entice them to try new things and extend beyond that area of comfort.”

— Wendy Brannen, Vidalia Onion Committee

the Mexico deal and Southern California,” reports Randy Lineberger, executive vice president at Forest Park, GA-based General Produce Inc. “That put us all in a little gap where there weren’t any vegetables available. So when the southern vegetables hit, people are ready for something different; they are ready for spring.”

Holidays like Easter, Mother’s Day, and Memorial Day provide ample opportunities for promoting southern vegetables, especially corn, according to Gary Myracle, executive director of produce field procurement for Associated Wholesale Grocers Inc., located in Kansas City, KS. “As you get into Florida and move up into Georgia, you get much more volume, so you’ve got good promotional pricing opportunities,” says Myracle. “As the corn comes in, it will often carry a front page ad if the price is right.”

According to Scott Varanko, produce manager for Norwalk, CT-based Stew Leonard’s Norwalk store, a quick peek at the latest nutrition-related media coverage will tell him which southern vegetables are likely to be in the greatest demand. Right now, for example, beets are a “big item,” on the heels of reports regarding its antioxidant and fiber content. “Whenever an item is mentioned in a journal or magazine, or referred to by Dr. Oz, there is a noticeable sales increase,” says Varanko.

Local Love Affair

While demand for southern vegetables

BRANCHING OUT

When most people think of southern-grown vegetables, visions of sweet potatoes, black-eyed peas, and mustard greens dance in their heads. Increasingly, however, southern farmers are growing crops that were traditionally produced on the West Coast. A significant volume of broccoli, cauliflower, lettuce, asparagus and other vegetables are now being grown thousands of miles from the West Coast locations.

While this may seem novel to many consumers and retailers, it’s actually nothing new, according to Kevin Hardison, agricultural marketing specialist for the Raleigh-based North Carolina Department of Agriculture (NCDA). “Several decades ago,” he explains, “a significant amount of lettuce was grown in Eastern North Carolina. Over time, however, the West Coast became the preferred climate for the production of lettuce because the air was less humid, there was less fungus, and it could be grown more economically.”

In recent years, research and technological innovations have resulted in new varieties that are much better suited to Southeastern growing conditions. That’s not just the case with lettuce, but with other traditionally western-grown vegetables as well. “Much of this technology is directed toward optimal variety development for the more dynamic or demanding growing conditions on the East Coast,” explains Daniel Whittles, director of marketing and product development for Boca Raton, FL-based Rosemont Farms. “We are working with hybrids that have more comprehensive disease resistance, improved taste or appearance and are especially suited to the unique growing conditions we encounter on the East Coast and in the South.”

Still, some distributors question whether the quality of such produce will be able to match that of western growers. Speaking under condition of anonymity, one Southern distributor contends, “Lettuce grown in Florida is nowhere near the lettuce that California grows. It’s got sort of a bitter taste and it doesn’t look as good. I just believe California is more cut out for growing those particular items, and I don’t foresee that ever changing.”

While retailers are intrigued by such developments — and some are starting to sell small amounts of southern-grown broccoli — there are questions about whether Southern growers will ever be able to produce large enough quantities of such vegetables to meet the demand. “With broccoli and cauliflower, the climate is very tricky for that,” admits Scott Varanko, produce manager for Norwalk, CT-based Stew Leonard’s Norwalk store. “We are definitely interested in it, but they have to develop the right seed for it. That’s a few years out still.”

Tifton, GA-based Lewis Taylor Farms has experimented with 400 different varieties of broccoli and now has 650 acres dedicated to four varieties, according to Bill Brim, president. The company is currently researching different varieties of cauliflower to determine which are best suited for the Southeast.

Any concern that dedicating so much acreage to non-core crops will encroach on land needed for other vegetables is overblown, maintains Charles Hall, executive director of the LaGrange-based Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA). “Most of the time, farmers are looking for variety,” he says. “If they can take a few acres out of a difficult crop and put it into another product that would be more beneficial profit-wise, they are interested in that rotation.”

For retailers and consumers east of the Mississippi, the appeal lies in the fact that crops grown closer to home are fresher when they reach the store and typically cost less. According to Brim, broccoli grown in Georgia costs four to five dollars less per box than California-grown broccoli, simply due to the freight savings. What’s more, today’s eco-conscious consumers are pleased whenever they are given the opportunity to make purchase decisions that will reduce their carbon footprint.

“The broccoli varieties that we grow in the Southeast are three to four days fresher when they get to the consumer and thousands of food miles have been saved,” agrees Lytch. “Consumers see that as a huge win, not only in the freshness and the taste of the product, but they see the benefit of reducing their carbon footprint as well.”

pb

“As you get into Florida and move up into Georgia, you get much more volume, so you’ve got good promotional pricing opportunities. As the corn comes in, it will often carry a front page ad if the price is right.”

— Gary Myracle, Associated Wholesale Grocers Inc.

extends across the country, the Midwest and Northeast are particularly strong areas, perhaps because such vegetables are still grown relatively close to home. These days, the demand for locally grown — or in this case, regionally grown — produce couldn’t be stronger. “Consumers are very sensitive to reducing food miles on vegetables,” says Lych of L & M. “Studies have shown that almost three out of four shoppers note buying local is important when it comes to fresh vegetables. If you sign it, advertise it and promote it, the consumer is going to buy it.”

The ample supply of vegetables available from the South provides many opportunities for retailers east of the Mississippi to avail themselves of fresh, regionally grown produce.



Vidalia onions are one of the South's most recognizable crops.

“We hit our stride in May with the early vegetables — squash, cabbage and green onions — then we move into sweet corn and cilantro and more ethnic-type goods,” says Eubanks of the SCDA. “The diversity of our product base creates a lot of opportunities for retailers in the Northeast to source products as they are coming up through the normal marketing channels.”

For retailers like Stew Leonard’s, the opportunity to show where a particular produce item came from appeals to consumers who prize vegetables grown relatively close to home. “When corn starts in Florida, we put up a map of the whole East Coast,” says Varanko. “As things come up the coast, we have a star with a little truck to promote how fresh it is.”

Then there are those consumers who grew up in the South, but now live further north. They end up missing the kinds of food their mothers and grandmothers used to make, leading them to gravitate toward southern vegetables, explains George Wooten, president of Wayne E. Bailey Produce Co., headquartered in Chadbourn, SC. Wooten recommends that retailers provide consumers with suggestions for preparing southern vegetables. Sweet potatoes, for example, can be baked and refrigerated to be fried up later for a quick and healthy breakfast. Likewise, spring and summer are ideal times to suggest grilling sweet potatoes and other southern veggies. His company often places recipes in the box with the potatoes so retailers can display them for consumers to take home.

Simply making consumers aware of where particular produce items were grown goes a long way, according to Charles Hall, executive director of the LaGrange-based Georgia Fruit & Vegetable Growers Association (GFVGA). “People recognize Georgia as a strong agricultural state,” he says. Marketing initiatives that can play off either southern vegetables or Georgia-grown vegetables can be quite beneficial to the retailer.”

The GFVGA encourages its growers to feature the “Georgia Grown” logo on its boxes and other materials. Likewise, the SCDA takes its “Certified South Carolina Grown” message into major market areas, including New York and New Jersey. According to Eubanks, such efforts go hand-in-hand with retailers’ existing locally grown advertising strategies. “We work to enhance those efforts — not overshadow them — with our certified program,” he says. “We take our logo bug and throw that in their weekly circular advertisements; we’ll offer signage at the store level — anything to capture more of the locally grown trend.”

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Through years of experience, Sambrailo has accumulated unparalleled knowledge of both our customers and their products. When this savvy is combined with our ingenuity and ability to stay in front of trends, the results are a win-win for all. For example, we foresaw the effects that the larger strawberry varieties would have on the clamshell capacity needs and have proactively come to the market with a MIXIM LV (large volume) 1-lb. clamshell.

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While often purchased on impulse, tie-ins can drive incremental produce sales.

COMPANION PRODUCTS

Supporting Players Take On Featured Roles In The Produce Department

Smart marketing and product placement allow tie-ins to add incremental sales to an already busy produce department. **BY AMY SAWELSON**

It's a given that a well-stocked, well-displayed produce department does more than simply fill shopping carts with basics for good health and sensible eating. It revs up imaginations and creativity by enticing shoppers with freshness, variety and a wealth of ideas.

The produce department is also the place where meals are conjured up, so having an ample supply of produce companion items is sure to spark creative juices and incremental sales along the way.

Boosting Produce Sales

Produce tie-ins enhance the sales of vegetables, salads and fresh fruit. Croutons, salad toppers, dips, flavor packets, glazes and crepes, among other tie-ins, are often purchased on impulse and can drive additional sales of produce and ultimately increase the department's profitability.

Brandon Steele, vice president of marketing for Fresh Gourmet in Sun Valley, CA, points out, "Consumers are influenced by what chefs

are doing in foodservice." One of the earliest marketers of croutons in retail and a supplier of salad toppings including glazed nuts and dried fruit, Fresh Gourmet is extending its "salad enhancer" line with protein toppings inspired by the many popular entrée salads found on menus today. Its Tuna Bites and Salmon Bites are cubed, packed in olive oil in resealable tubs in a variety of flavors and are also shelf-stable. "With these key items for entrée salads in the produce section, it's certain the customer will spend an additional \$10 - \$15 on lettuce, tomatoes, onions and anything else to complete the meal," adds Steele.

There is a definite correlation between sales of tie-in items and additional sales in the produce department. "For every \$2.50 unit of one of our salad kits purchased, customers will spend \$1.50 on romaine, and most likely add cucumbers, celery or other vegetables for their salads," reports marketing manager Dixie Michie of Markham, ONT, Canada-based Linsey Foods Ltd. "Featuring our salad kits near the produce helps spur sales of both categories."

Wiley Mullins, founder and president of Wiley's Specialty Foods Inc., in Fairfield, CT, is an outspoken cheerleader for healthful eating, and has created a line of seasoning blends called Salad Jazz, as well as seasoning packets for peas, potatoes, corn, rice, yams and apple pie. Wiley's philosophy is to get people to eat more produce, which parallels the objectives of produce executives at large retailers. "When customers purchase a bag of salad greens, they typically buy at least four other produce items," he reveals. "They'll buy our Salad Jazz and seasonings on impulse. Using them to enhance salads encourages people to eat more produce and vegetables at home. An added benefit to the consumer is that by eating more salads, they are more likely to use up their packaged greens, which means less waste and a better value for them."

With the increasing availability of organic produce in mainstream supermarkets, it's logical that there should be organic tie-ins as well. Good Life organic croutons from Melissa's/World Variety Produce Inc., based

“For every \$2.50 unit of one of our salad kits purchased, customers will spend \$1.50 on romaine, and most likely add cucumbers, celery or other vegetables for their salads. Featuring our salad kits near the produce helps spur sales of both categories.”

— Dixie Michie, Linsey Foods Ltd.

Side Note

PRICING PROMOTIONS

As in any category of products sold in a supermarket or other retailers, marketers of produce tie-ins products will do temporary price reductions to help fund in-store promotions. Dixie Michie of Markham, ONT, Canada-based Linsey Foods Ltd., explains, “Couponing is expensive, so we don’t do much of that. We’ll do a ‘BOCO,’ where consumers buy a head of lettuce and the store will offer \$1-off one of our Et Tu salad kits. On the other hand, at Publix, we had a deal where customers would purchase one of our Caesar Salad kits and receive \$1 off Publix’s private label romaine.”

For Brockton, MA-based Concord Foods Inc., vice president of sales and marketing, Charles Olins, maintains, “IRCs work best.” When Concord licensed with Chiquita bananas to tie in with its banana bread mix, they created an IRC offering \$1-off bananas with purchase of the mix. “This was immediately successful,” he reports. “We tried recipe cards at various times and we found the success of that program hard to gauge.”

Director of marketing at Vernon, CA-based Melissa’s/World Variety Inc., Robert Schueller, contends, in the case of its Good Life organic croutons and packaged crepes, the way to go is with recipes, demos, education and in-store signage, rather than coupons. “Ours is not a discounted brand, so we will put recipe ideas on our packages of crepes and croutons to encourage additional usage of our products and everything else in the produce department,” he explains. “All of our packaging also directs the consumer to our Web site for additional ideas.”

The approach of Wiley Mullins, founder and president of Wiley’s Specialty Foods Inc., in Fairfield, CT, is to promote his Salad Jazz and seasonings in conjunction with retailers, “especially during May, which is Salad

Month,” he says. “We have an offer of a specially created shaker to dispense our Salad Jazz toppings in the shape of jazz musicians. We’ll place tear-out pads near the racks of our products in the produce department for customers to send away for it. They can also order it online.”

Saco Foods in Middletown, WI, is another company that does not offer direct coupons, but rather, provides coupons for money off the price of its dip products with the purchase of strawberries. Tony Sanna, vice president of sales and marketing, says, “We’ve had success with displays that we set up with the retailer. For example, as a seasonal tie-in with pecans, we set up 100 cases of displays in H-E-B stores in Texas. The 72-pack shippers have six flats each to create an instant tie-in on a table or free standing in the aisle.”

T. Marzetti Co., headquartered in Columbus, OH, has many tie-in products that are marketed in produce departments, the best known of which are refrigerated salad dressings. The company’s other tie-in items include croutons, sweet and savory dips and salad accents. Mary Beth Cowardin, senior marketing manager reports Marzetti utilizes coupon drops and Sunday inserts. “For us, it’s the best way to promote seasonal tie-ins with tailgating parties, Super Bowl, college basketball, March Madness and traditional holidays,” she explains. “We have recently been utilizing online coupons. They don’t have the reach yet of Sunday coupon supplements, but it’s growing.”

Adds Marzetti vice president, Carla Laylin, “We also do IRCs and purchase space in coupon booklets published by promotional agencies, which include a number of items we cross-merchandise with such as nuts, dressings and croutons with bagged salads.” **pb**

in Vernon, CA, are sold along with organic lettuces and dressings, where “they drive sales of organic produce and other complementary items,” says director of marketing Robert Schueller.

Melissa’s line of crepes and dessert sauces are almost exclusively sold in produce departments. The ideal location, of course, is near bananas and seasonal berries. Says Schueller, “Crepe sales increase during May, June and July, at the peak of the season when strawberries, blueberries and raspberries are in good supply and the prices are down a bit. That’s when we have tie-ins with berries and retailers do cross-merchandising in their ads.”

Concord Foods Inc., of Brockton, MA, markets a number of tie-ins that can be found in the produce department, including apple-related items — caramel apple kits and Apple Crisp Mix — as well as caramel and chocolate dips, smoothie mixes, fresh dessert glazes and seasoning mixes. Vice president of sales and marketing, Charles Olins, explains, “We have done studies that confirm that a \$2 box of Apple Crisp Mix can drive a \$4 apple sale. In the case of our strawberry glaze, the ratio can be even more dramatic.”

Strawberries were one of the first items that retailers saw the benefit of cross merchandising and have been associated with non-produce tie-in items longer than most any other fruit. Saco Foods in Middletown, WI, has been doing it with its Dolci Frutta chocolate dips for 25 years. According to Tony Sanna, vice president of sales and marketing for the family-owned company, “One canister of Dolci Frutta will sell two baskets of strawberries. This is especially helpful when strawberries are at their most expensive — at the very beginning of the season and toward the end of strawberry season in the fall,” he says.

The chocolate dip enhances the appeal of fresh strawberries beyond the typical summer berry season and into Thanksgiving and Christmas, when strawberries dipped in chocolate are enjoyed as a festive confection. Besides strawberries, “Kids love dipping everything in chocolate — oranges, bananas, cookies, even nuts,” adds Sanna. “And other holidays like Valentine’s Day and Mother’s Day are great opportunities for sales of do-it-yourself chocolate dipped strawberries.”

Spacing Suggestion

While manufacturers of produce tie-in items would naturally like to see a larger percentage of space dedicated to their products, Dan Sutton, director of produce

“These tie-in items often make consumers aware of a need or a solution they may not have thought about before. In fact, a tie-in item might be so compelling that shoppers may not have intended to purchase berries, but catching sight of the crepes inspires them to pick them up.”

— Jackie Caplan Wiggins, Frieda's Inc.

procurement for Albertson's LLC, headquartered in Boise, ID, takes a practical approach from his standpoint as a retailer, “We look at space to sales and display tie-ins with associated items,” he says. “It really varies by division depending on the demographics of the region.”

Concord's Olins agrees, adding, “It's not simply a matter of how much space is allotted for non-produce tie-ins, but where it is. Guacamole mix needs to be near the avocados, chocolate dips near the strawberries and bananas where two to three facings are near the appropriate items. The retailers who do the best job displaying produce and related tie-ins can sell four to five times more of everything.”

Jackie Caplan Wiggins, vice president of Frieda's Inc., located in Los Alamitos, CA, sums it up, “The amount of space allotted to tie-ins depends on the size of the product and the size of the display. Non-produce tie-ins should look purposeful — not just tacked on as an afterthought,” she explains. “They should be proportionate to the overall size of the display and arranged tastefully so as not to lose the impact of the fresh display. The produce department should not be cluttered with a bunch of gadgets. There have to be the right items to bring value.”

Maximize Success

When queried about the profitability of produce department tie-in items to the retailers, most marketers are fairly circumspect with their comments. A universal observation, however, is that this category doesn't experience the shrinkage of fresh produce, so retailers don't experience much loss. Some companies claim to have no data regarding the profitability of their items to the retailers, stating supermarkets set their own margins or that it “depends on the account.” Others offered retailers mark-up tie-in items with a gross margin of 50 percent and that the non-produce tie-ins have generally healthy margins.

“It's another ring for the produce department that's not perishable,” adds a major retailer who wanted to remain anonymous. “The tie-ins may be more profitable than produce, but the cost of the ‘real estate’ in the

department is high on those non-produce items. There is more gross margin on caramel dip, but by far the volume is on the apples.”

To maximize the success of produce department tie-ins, companies arm themselves with a variety of merchandising options to help stores drive sales. These can range from veritable armies of professional merchandisers with slick displays to a strictly “stand back” approach. Some will come in and arrange the tie-in items with the appropriate produce, bring in shelving, signage, create shippers and handle all the details. Other retailers prefer to maintain more control in their stores, opting instead to have their own staff set up products.

Linsey Foods provides shippers with promotion-specific headers for their Et Tu Salad Kits and the extent of their involvement depends on the account. Marzetti will bring in a high level of assistance to support its retail customers with racks for its non-refrigerated

dressings, spinners for its crouton line as well as shipper displays. Marzetti uses its broker network to set up displays and assemble semi-permanent wood and metal racks.

Brian Groves, marketing director of Brea, CA-based Ventura Foods LLC, maker of Marie's dressing, says, “We prefer to work with our retailer partners to develop the promotions, suggest where the items should be displayed, and, in conjunction with our retail broker partners, help build the displays and assist with the signage needed, as approved by the retailer.” Sandpoint, ID-based Litehouse Foods' Roxie Lowther, director of business development, is also among the marketers that work with brokers in the field to assist retailers with promotions and displays of their dips and dressings.

One thing is certain when it comes to the profitability of non-produce items in the produce department: they are an important part of the mix or they wouldn't be there. Schueller of Melissa's says, “It's ‘salad economics.’ In terms of dollars, products like croutons, crepes and dips drive the sales of produce items. We promote our croutons with packaging and merchandising to the point that they are a top national brand. The presence of gourmet croutons or any items that enhance produce sparks creativity in shoppers and that puts them in the frame of mind to make purchases beyond bagged salads.”

Frieda's Caplan Wiggins offers a similar observation, “These tie-in items often make consumers aware of a need or a solution they may not have thought about before. In fact, a tie-in item might be so compelling that shoppers may not have intended to purchase berries, but catching sight of the crepes inspires them to pick them up.”

The advantage of the produce section of a supermarket is that it presents a lush, colorful collection of fresh meal possibilities. Produce tie-ins should be used as a way to create more excitement for the customer in the department. Groves sums it up, “As consumers struggle with time constraints in their daily lives, any quick and easy suggestions for meal preparations are appreciated. The space allocated for tie-in promotions should be sufficient to call attention to the meal solution, the associated meal components and provide enough space for sufficient product to cover the incremental sales that the promotion will generate.” Produce tie-ins and companion items succeed when they boost the sales of produce. There are many elements in today's retail environment and among food trends generally aligned to facilitate growth and success.

pb



PHOTO COURTESY OF WILEY'S SALAD JAZZ

Get Bullish On Organic Berries

With properly timed promotions and front-and-center displays, organic berries have earned a rightful place in the produce department. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



According to berry experts, in the past year, organic berry demand has grown 20 percent when compared to the prior year.

The demand for organic berries continues to grow in the depths of the recession, even if not at the dizzying pace of recent years. As the economy rebounds, organic berries are showing they could be poised for yet another run of double-digit growth. “The organic fresh berry category has rebounded from slower growth during the economic downturn in late 2008,” reports Doug Ronan, vice president of marketing at Driscoll’s, based in Watsonville, CA. In the past 12 months, consumer demand for organic berries has been up 20 percent compared to the prior year. Many retailers are looking at organic berries as a strong growth opportunity.”

A Fresh Look Marketing survey at the end of last year justifies a bullish attitude toward berries in general, and organic berries in particular. “At the end of 2010, organic berry dollar sales were growing at 20 percent and pound sales at 17 percent. Organic berries represented six percent of total berry category dollar sales and four percent of pound sales. The berry category is No. 1 in produce department dollar sales at more than \$3.2 billion,” says Chris Christian, vice president of marketing at the Watsonville-based California Strawberry Commission.

Whatever little slump organic berries endured appears to have ended. “In spite of the economic hardships, we have continued to see growth in organic sales,” reveals Stephanie Hilton, marketing consultant at Beach Street Farms LLC, in Watsonville, CA.

Peak Promotional Opportunity

The demand for organic berries is undeniable, but effectively merchandising them to the broadest possible spectrum of consumers requires developing a strategy on where to place them and finding those times when the premium for organic is relatively small. Dan Sutton, director of produce procurement for Albertsons LLC, based in Boise, ID, asserts, “When we get them at the right price, they really move. If there’s a premium it slows down, but there’s still some demand.”

The key to selling organic berries to the broadest possible public is finding them at a price premium that is high enough to keep the grower in the organic business, but low enough to entice the consumers. “Sales depend on the pricing, but even with the economic times we’re in, organics are continuing to hold their own,” notes Dick Rissman, produce manager at Dahl’s Food Markets Inc., headquartered in Des Moines, IA, with 12 units. “There’s some

demand for them. The pricing keeps getting closer to the conventional, so there’s not an outrageous premium.”

There is strong evidence that the market for organic strawberries doubles when the price is right. “Demand has been up,” acknowledges Jim Roberts, vice president of sales at Estero, FL-based Naturipe Farms LLC. “We saw double-digit growth in 2010, but it’s still five to six percent of the berries. From what we’ve seen with other mature segments, organics peak at about 10 percent. There is a core market of about four percent, and above that, it is price-driven.”

The organic premium varies a lot depending on when you are buying. “The difference in pricing between organic and conventional berries varies throughout the production cycle,” Hilton says.

More than 80 percent of the nation’s strawberries are grown on a narrow stretch of coastal California farmland extending from Oxnard, a few miles north of Los Angeles, to Watsonville, 75 miles south of San Francisco. The harvest begins in the south and moves north. Because all of these regions have long strawberry harvests and there is a period in the late spring and early summer when the harvests from these areas are overlapping,



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— Gary Wishnatzki, Wishnatzki Farms

abundant supply of both conventional and organic strawberries is guaranteed. This is a prime time for organic berry promotions.

“In May or June the cost difference narrows and the sales of organic berries increase,” says Cindy Jewell, director of marketing for California Giant Berry Farms, headquartered in Oxnard, CA.

A majority of the potential customers for organic berries will only take a serious look when the premium is relatively small. The growth of the entire organic berry category is led by the growth of organic strawberries from the coastal farmlands of California, and many growers are devoting more resources to organics. Paul Rabadan, organic sales manager at Oxnard, CA-based Deardorff Family Farms, asserts, “We’re getting started in organics, and we see the category growing by 10 to 15 percent or more. We’re seeing increased interest and steady demand.”

This established California growing operation is counting on organics to become a very significant minority of its production. “We’ve been doing organics for five to seven years, but this year is a major increase for us,” adds Rabadan. “Sustainable farming has been part of the company culture for decades. Maybe 10 percent of our berries are organic, but we could see that rising to 30 percent not far off in the horizon.”

Organic Challenges

Pricing concerns are not only a consideration for retailers and consumers. Growers, too, have to deal with the increased production cost for organic berries. “We find production costs are quite high with organics, especially for strawberries,” admits Rabadan. “The soil preparation costs more.” He maintains the company needs a 10 to 20 percent premium to make the economics of organic production work.

That range for the organic premium seems pretty common among California growers. “We’d like to get a 20 percent premium for our

organic strawberries, but we can’t always get it,” admits Jim Grabowski, marketing manager for Well-Pict Inc. located in Watsonville, CA.

Driscoll’s finds a similar organic premium to be common. “The price premium varies by market and retailer,” notes Ronan. “In general, it is 15 percent above the price levels of similar conventional options.”

The premium for organic berries has already dropped considerably, as growers have become more adept at managing diseases and fertility without chemicals, and distributors have developed a more efficient supply chain for organics. But the organic premium could eventually drop even more if growers can find land suitable for organic strawberry production.

“It’s opportunistic,” admits Jewell. “We expand organics when we find the right ground and the right grower. It’s a small percent of our business, and the produce market, in general. It’s probably about five percent of the berries.”

Coastal California has the most expensive farmland in the nation, and organic farmland is particularly expensive and difficult to find. “Organic land is hard to obtain, and there is a tough three-year transition process,” Grabowski says.

California strawberries may be the leader, but Florida has also developed a substantial organic berry segment. Gary Wishnatzki, president and CEO of Wishnatzki Farms, in Plant City, FL, reports, “We grew more organic berries this year, and we were able to sell them. We had about 100 acres of organic strawberries in Florida this year. There is a gradual increase; it seems like there was more demand this year.”

With organic strawberries, demand is greatly affected by the premium, which is likely to be considerably higher for organic strawberries grown in Florida. “Yields are quite a bit lower than the conventional and our costs are higher,” explains Wishnatzki. “The premiums we need in Florida are much



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Some retailers display organic berries within an organic section, while others merchandise them with conventional berries.

higher than in California.”

One strategy for dealing with the organic premium may be to market berries that are grown conventionally, but offer the promise of having no chemical residues on the fruit. “We’re going to introduce something new this year — a pesticide/residue-free offering,” reveals Wishnatzki. “I think consumers will gravitate toward that. We can’t sell them as organic, because they aren’t, but I believe consumers will be willing to pay more for pesticide/residue-free berries.”

The Organic Berry Portfolio

Although strawberries lead the way, there is also a significant and growing market for organic blueberries, blackberries and raspberries. “We probably have 10 percent of our strawberry crop in organic, and we sell it all,” Grabowski says. But Well-Pict also grows organic raspberries, although the share of their raspberries in organic is less than its strawberries.

Other growers are also filling out their organic production to include a full range of berries. “We are offering organic blueberries and demand for them is good, too,” Wishnatzki says.

Even in these tough economic times, Sunnyridge Farm Inc, based in Winter Haven, FL, is finding increasing demand for

“Retailers are pretty creative and come up with their own way of doing things. Some retailers have an organic section, while others put them next to the conventional berries. Whatever they do, we want to make sure they are front-and-center.”

— Paul Rabadan, Deardorff Family Farms



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organic berries. The company started with organic blueberries and blackberries three years ago and plans to add raspberries to their organic program soon, and then fill out the organic berry menu with strawberries in the next few years.

Although there is significant interest in organic blueberries, raspberries and blackberries, they all have relatively short harvest seasons, and gaps in availability prevent these markets from reaching their peaks. "The big difference between organic strawberries and

"You've got retailers who believe strongly in having an organic section and putting all the organic produce together. Then there are other retailers who believe in putting them next to the conventional strawberries and figure consumers who are looking to buy strawberries will consider buying the organic."

— Cindy Jewell, California Giant Berry Farms



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other organic berries is availability," points out Naturipe's Roberts.

Where To Put Them

There are differences of opinion on whether it is best to display organic berries next to the conventional berries or in a separate organic produce section. "You've got retailers who believe strongly in having an organic section and putting all the organic produce together," relates California Giant's Jewell. "Then there are other retailers who believe in putting them next to the conventional strawberries and figure consumers who are looking to buy strawberries will consider buying the organic. It depends on how the retailer markets its organic produce. If they have a really attractive, prominent display for the organic produce they'll want to put them there."

Merchandising organic berries also heavily depends on store demographics. Roberts says, "With most retailers, it works better to have them integrated with the conventional berries. But if you are a destination store for organics, like Whole Foods, it is better to keep them in a separate organic section."

The danger of putting them in a separate organic section, however, can be that they will not be seen. "If you're advertising conventional berries at one price and organic at another, you can confuse consumers if you put them next to each other," warns Wishnatzki of Wishnatzki Farms. "But it's worrisome to find organic berries on a shelf in the corner. If you can't find them, impulse sales are eliminated."

Other producers agree that it is too easy to leave the organic berries out of sight and out of mind. "I think the organic berries get a little lost," states Well-Pict's Grabowski. "I'd like to see them in an organic section and also with the conventional strawberries, but if I had to choose I would place them next to the conventional strawberries."



Stores with a relatively small core of loyal organic customers may do well to keep organic berries in a special organic produce section. Dahl's Rissman details, "We have them in the organic section, and we keep them refrigerated at all times."

There is no one school of thought here, as industry leaders have different suggestions. "I would recommend including a berry section in an organic display area," says Christian from the California Strawberry Commission.

"If the supply is good we put them next to the conventional. But if we can't get enough, we put them in the organic section. Consumer choice often depends on the quality. If you've got a conventional that doesn't look as nice, and there's a small premium, people will buy the organic. If they are priced similarly, the one that looks the best will sell."

— Dan Sutton, Albertsons LLC

But Ronan from Driscoll's makes the opposite suggestion. "We believe that organic berries should be integrated into the merchandising set of fresh berries," he says. "This results in the greatest level of consumer engagement in the berry category."

At Save Mart, the decision of where to display the organic berries depends on the supply. "If the supply is good we put them next to the conventional," notes Sutton. "But if we can't get enough, we put them in the organic section." He finds purchasing decisions frequently comes down to which berries look the best. "Consumer choice often depends on

the quality. If you've got a conventional that doesn't look as nice, and there's a small premium, people will buy the organic. If they are priced similarly, the one that looks the best will sell."

This is an area where produce retailers have an opportunity to exercise their creativity. "Retailers are pretty creative and come up with their own way of doing things," acknowledges Deardorff's Rabadan. "Some retailers have an organic section, while others put them next to the conventional berries. Whatever they do, we want to make sure they are front-and-center." **pb**

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Make Way For Mangos

Consumer education and smart marketing will move more mangos. **CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



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Because the skin of the Ataulfo mango tends to wrinkle when ripe, uneducated retailers mistake perfectly ripe mangos as shrink.

Mangos are the world's most consumed fruit. This fact represents one fantastic sales opportunity. The challenge is enticing U.S. consumers to make this tropical fruit a shopping list staple. After all, consider that Americans' per capita consumption of fresh mangos in 2008 was 2.11 pounds compared to 25.06 pounds for another favorite tropical — the banana — according to USDA/ Economic Research Service statistics. Mangos' contribution to total produce sales for the 52 weeks ending January 29, 2011 was only 0.4 percent, up 0.1 percent from the year prior, according to the Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based market research firm that tracks and analyzes retail sales data of fresh foods.

Joe DeLorenzo, director of produce for C-Town Supermarkets, based in White Plains, NY, reports, "Mangos have become a mainstream item for us, but there still needs to be consumer education, especially in areas concerning the different varieties and how to identify ripe fruit."

1. Grow Your SKUs From One To Many

Many retailers just carry one variety of mango at a time, says Chris Ciruli, chief oper-

ating officer for Ciruli Bros. LLC, in Nogales, AZ. "Some might carry two, a red and a yellow. But three or four different varieties at one time are a rarity at most stores."

Mangos with a red blush are offered year-round at Lakeland, FL-based Publix Super Markets. "We also carry the Ataulfo mango from March through July and Haitian mangos from the end of March through the end of June," details Maria Brous, director of media and community relations.

Jose Manzano, director of produce for Dorothy Lane Markets, a three-store chain based in Dayton, OH, adds, "We carry the Ataulfo in the spring, then additional varieties as availability of fruit gets better in the late spring and summer."

"The best-selling variety of mango is the Tommy Atkins," reports Ronnie Cohen, vice president of sales for Vision Import Group LLC, in River Edge, NJ, and 2011 chairman of the Orlando, FL-based National Mango Board. "It offers several positive characteristics. It ships well, which is important because more than 90 percent of mangos in the United States are imported. It holds up well during hot-water treatment to control against fruit fly, and it also has a red-blush, which consumers like."

Lorenzo says, "Most customers buy with

their eyes and will only pick up mangos with a red blush. This can hinder sales of mangos because there are green-skinned varieties that eat very well."

According to Bill Vogel, president of Tavilla Sales Co. of Los Angeles, in Los Angeles, CA, says, "The best eating varieties of mangos are Kent (green-skin) and Ataulfo (yellow-skin), next the Haden (green-skin) and least desirable is the Tommy (red-skin)."

Wendy McManus, director of marketing for the National Mango Board (NMB), says, "In the past, some retailers backed away from their mango business when the green Kent and Keitt varieties came into season. However, over the past two years, we have seen a dramatic shift from the retailers."

Why? "There are plenty of ethnic populations that know which varieties eat better than others," says Steve Yubeta, vice president of sales for Farmer's Best International LLC, based in Rio Rico, AZ. "These shoppers wait for these varieties, and once they start they can have a significant impact on the retail sales."

"One mango variety that is increasing in sales due to its flavor is the Madame Francis or Haitian mango," reveals Mark Vertrees, marketing director for M & M Farm Inc, based in Miami, FL. "This is a specialty mango — a

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connoisseur's mango. It's a very sweet, yellow-skin variety with a unique flavor that's only available from April to July. It's well known to customers from Haiti and the Caribbean. We've brought it in from a grower that we've worked with in Haiti for the past three to four years for retailers from New York to Florida."

Indian varieties of mangos, such as the yellow-skin Kesar and Alphonso, have made their way to the U.S. market over the past few years. "In addition," says Cohen, "we'll see fruit come in from Pakistan this summer. There are hundreds of varieties of mangos in Pakistan as well as India. I foresee a bright future for these in the United States as the technology to irradiate them improves and costs decrease."

Mango skin color presents a huge opportunity for retailers who want to grow their mango business. McManus notes, "Throughout the spring and summer months, retailers can offer two or even three colors of mangos at the same time. When consumers see red, yellow and green-skinned mangos presented side by side, they can begin to understand that each variety has different flavor and texture characteristics. Retailers can create an opportunity for consumers to explore and compare the different varieties to learn their preference."

Ambitious retailers add organic mangos to their inventory list as well. However, Farmer's Best's Yubeta points out, "They are usually priced higher than regular mangos, which can be a challenge as most people associate the fruit as being inexpensive the majority of the time."

Organic mangos represented only 2.2

"Merchandising methods aside, the benefits of packaging are that it keeps the fruit warmer and more protected during transport, there's less shrink from excessive handling at store level and consumers feel a stronger connection to the product because of on-pack information."

— Chris Ciruli, Ciruli Bros. LLC

percent of mango dollar sales for the 52 weeks ending January 29, 2011, according to the Perishables Group.

Fresh-cut mango is a huge growth item, mentions the NMB's McManus. "As the economy bounces back and consumers look once again to convenience, mangos will be well-positioned to get consumers excited about fresh-cut fruit," she explains. "We know that many consumers are unsure about how to cut or judge the ripeness of a mango. Fresh-cut mango helps overcome these obstacles and adds an exotic twist to any mixed fruit bowl or tray."

2. Offer Ripe Fruit And Consumer Education

"When consumers eat an immature mango, they won't go back for a while," warns Yubeta.

Larry Nienkerk, partner and general manager of Splendid Products LLC, in Burlingame, CA, reveals, "There is talk in the industry of pre-conditioning fruit. But it's easier said than done, especially when you consider most fruit comes from offshore and undergoes a hot-water treatment."

Discussions around ripe and ready-to-eat mangos are growing in intensity in the United States, agrees McManus. "Retailers in Europe have been selling ready-to-eat mangos with great success," she acknowledges. "We hear requests from retailers and consumers for this type of program, and we have done some research on techniques for delivering ready-to-eat mangos to retail. I think we will see retailers and suppliers partnering to deliver ready-to-eat mangos to their customers very soon."

Tavilla's Vogel warns, "Merchandising ripe fruit on the shelves that is already soft can increase shrink and create a sloppy display. However, in some stores that would double consumption if the produce clerk knew how to manage it, similar to a ripe avocado program."

"One of the biggest challenges," according to McManus, "is to teach consumers how to

judge ripe fruit for themselves."

"Color — or a red blush — does not equate to ripeness," says Yubeta of Farmer's Best. "This will require educating the produce managers first so that they can pass down that knowledge to the end consumers." A red blush on a mango is a varietal characteristic that is enhanced by direct exposure to the sun. Some mangos get more sun than others based on their position on the tree, and some varieties do not get the red blush at all.

"In addition, it's important for store-level personnel to understand that the yellow Ataulfo mango ripens to a deep gold color and the skin becomes slightly wrinkled," describes NMB's McManus. "This is the ideal time to eat this mango. Unfortunately, some retailers are delegating these perfectly ripe mangos to the shrink bin."

On the consumer front, McManus adds, "We have made a special effort to move consumers past skin color as a guide for selection. We have header cards and tear-pads to promote yellow- or green-skinned mangos. And, we promote the message, 'Squeeze gently to judge ripeness,' to help consumers understand when their mango is ready to eat."

3. Suggest Usage Ideas

Beyond educating consumers about the different varieties of mangos and how to pick ripe fruit, usage is an important area of education. Isabel Freeland, vice president and chief financial officer of San Diego, CA-based Coast Citrus Distributors Inc., recognizes, "You can't just display mangos and hope they will move. You have to educate customers about how to cut, prepare and eat them."

Dorothy Lane's Manzano says, "We provide our customers with a lot of information in POS signage, especially about how to eat and enjoy mangos."

"Another way to accomplish this education is with in-store sampling, recipes and cross-promotions," advises Freeland. "The mango is versatile. It can be used to make a sauce on a

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“This year, because of higher yields in all growing regions, we expect good production, pricing and opportunities to promote. As a result, for the first time, we will be planning ads with retailers two months in advance for July and August for mangos out of Mexico.”

— Rodrigo Diaz, *Diazteca Co.*

protein entrée, with alcohol in drinks and in desserts. You can also merchandise green mangos to be used as a vegetable in salads or with fish and pork or simply sprinkled with salt and lime.”

“In addition to educational POS,” suggests McManus, “reach consumers through story boxes in the weekly circular. Retailers also have opportunities on their Web sites and through social media outlets.”

Ciruli Bros.’ Ciruli adds, “The biggest markets for mangos are the West, East, Chicago and Texas. We’ve come a long way, but there’s still more room to go.” Mango contribution to total produce sales is highest in the West at 0.5

percent and lowest in Central states at 0.3 percent, according to the Perishables Group.

4. Display With And Without Tropicals

Mangos are displayed prominently with other tropicals at C-Town Supermarket, according to DeLorenzo.

Similarly, at Publix, Brous details, “We display mangos with other tropical fruits, roots and vegetables.”

Manzano adds, “We’ll merchandise mangos in their own free-standing display near the other tropicals in the summer and in a basket by the bananas in the winter.”

Mangos are best displayed with other trop-

ical fruits, admits the NMB’s McManus. “However, retailers have had great success building a display of bananas and mangos. Pineapple/mango displays have also been very popular and highly successful.”

Some retailers also single out mangos in displays both in and out of the produce department. For example, C-Town Supermarkets’ DeLorenzo says, “They get an end cap to themselves when they are on promotion.”

Brous shares, “We may have secondary displays throughout the store if mangos tie in to another theme or if they are on promotion.”

“Big displays at the front of the store with competitively priced fruit do well,” maintains Farmer’s Best’s Yubeta. “I have also seen them sell well at the check-out stand as an impulse item.”

“Since mangos don’t need to be refrigerated, they can be displayed near the tomatoes and avocados,” says Ciruli of Ciruli Bros. “The ethylene these fruits give off will help mangos to ripen. Some retailers also put mangos in the liquor section next to champagne.”

“Creative secondary displays are always great,” says McManus, “but customers want to be able to find the mangos without searching through the department. Once retailers have

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established a position for the primary mango display, they should try to stick with it.”

Another big challenge is space. “Mangos make up 40 percent of the tropical fruit category nationwide, and many retailers are not actually giving them 40 percent of the tropical fruit display space,” laments McManus. “This is a missed opportunity to attract more attention to mangos and move this profitable item.”

5. Bulk, Packaged Or Both?

Bulk, sold loose by the each or in multiples for 3-for-\$1 or 2-for-\$3, depending on size and supply, is how most retailers display and merchandise mangos.

“However, says Ciruli, “there have been great strides in consumer packaging, for example, 4- and 6-pack clamshells. In fact, we have a new retail customer for our Champagne mango that wants a clamshell pack with recipes, images of preparation instructions and its web address on pack.”

“Some club stores and ethnic markets will sell an 8- to 10-lb. box of mangos,” adds Vision Import’s Cohen. “Then again, some conventional retailers will sell two mangos in a bag or overwrap pack to be creative or create interest.”

“Merchandising methods aside, the benefits of packaging are that it keeps the fruit warmer and more protected during transport, there’s less shrink from excessive handling at store level and consumers feel a stronger connection to the product because of on-pack information,” details Ciruli.

6. Know When To Promote

“Spring and summer are when sales of

mangos are strongest at Dorothy Lane Markets,” reports Manzano. “This is when we will promote the most. There is good quality fruit available, good volume and we can offer a good price.”

Mangos’ contribution to produce department dollar sales is indeed highest from April to July, reaching 0.7 percent the week of May 8, during the 52-week period ending January 29, 2011, according to the Perishables Group.

The No. 1 challenge is to match peak production in the fields and U.S. availability to retail ads, says Rodrigo Diaz, vice president of sales and marketing for Diazteca Co., in Rio Rico, AZ. “This year, because of higher yields in all growing regions, we expect good production, pricing and opportunities to promote. As a result, for the first time, we will be planning ads with retailers two months in advance for July and August for mangos out of Mexico. Yet, warm weather months aren’t the only opportunities to promote mangos,” Diaz adds. “There are peaks in production in October from Brazil, in December for Ecuador and February from Peru.”

“At C-Town Supermarkets,” says DeLorenzo, “we advertise mangos — the Kent, Keitt, Tommy Atkins and Ataulfo, whatever varieties are available throughout the different seasons.”

McManus says, “We encourage retailers to spread their mango promotions out during the year and to plan a promotion around a yellow- or green-skinned variety. Price is important, but large colorful displays and secondary displays can actually be just as impactful as price.”

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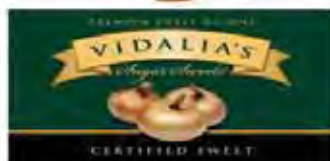
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Make The Most Of The Short Cherry Season

Promotional planning, creative cross-merchandising and front-and-center displays take full advantage of this high-impulse seasonal item. **BY K.O. MORGAN**



PHOTO COURTESY OF RAINIER FRUIT CO.

Cherries are often impulse purchases, but can generate the highest sales per square foot — up to \$201 — in the produce department.

Easily damaged, short shelf-life, temperature-sensitive, limited season and expensive are all words often used to describe cherries. But the uniqueness and great taste of cherries can also make the register ring for retailers who plan ahead during cherry season.

“The biggest challenge for retailers is not missing one week of promotion,” says Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Stemilt Growers LLC, located in Wenatchee, WA. “The season is short and you cannot afford to miss a week with an explosive category like cherries.”

Bob Mast, vice president of marketing at Wenatchee, WA-based Columbia Marketing International Corp. (CMI), asserts, “If you don’t take full advantage of the eight to 12 weeks of cherry season — if you miss even just a week — you don’t get it back, so retailers must have a good plan going into cherry season.”

“But we believe it’s a good thing that cherries are seasonal,” adds Pepperl. “Cherries may be one of the last major items that have that status.”

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Sage Fruit Co. LLC, in Yakima, WA, agrees. “We see the seasonality of cherries

as an advantage, as a point of differentiation that we embrace,” he says.

“Being seasonal helps the fruit sell because people know that they only have three months to buy,” maintains Jack Armstrong, senior produce buyer for Bashas’ Inc., located in Chandler, AZ.

Making The Room

Cherries are often impulse purchases, yet they yield the highest sales per square foot of all fruits and vegetables when they are in season. Proper display and creative promotions are ways retailers can make the most of their short availability. “Dedicating proper display space and promoting cherries are key in getting the message out to consumers that cherries are here and are in season,” says Sinks.

“All items want preferential treatment and location, but cherries have one of the highest cash register rings per purchase in the produce department,” points out Pepperl.

Sinks agrees, advising, “Because cherries are one of the highest impulse items, they need to be placed in heavy traffic areas of the department.”

“Cherries may present some space allocation challenges for the retailer, but the

opportunities far outweigh the inconvenience,” contends Dovey Plain, marketing coordinator at Family Tree Farms Marketing LLC, based in Reedley, CA. “Research shows that during the months of May and June, cherries can generate up to \$201 per square foot.”

“Retailers have to dedicate space for cherries for a limited amount of time and displace other year-round items,” says Larelle Miller, sales manager for Lodi, CA-based Rivermaid Trading Co. “This prominent spacing is beneficial, because it allows retailers to take advantage of the profitability of cherries.”

Not all retailers realize how important this space allocation is to their bottom dollar, however. “A study by the Northwest Cherry Growers and the Perishables Group in 2009 shows that while cherries return more dollars per square foot than any other produce item, they average the second smallest allocation of shelf space,” reports James Michael, promotion director for both the Washington State Fruit Commission and the Northwest Cherry Growers, based in Yakima, WA. “Cherries are the only item with a statistically strong correlation between increasing shelf-space and increasing dollar contribution.”

“The proper placement and display size will



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produce the desired results if promoted in tandem with good advertising frequency and great quality cherries," says Pepperl of Stemilt Growers. "This makes the front display an easy choice for most retailers. If product turns are extremely high, the cherries can do well in a non-refrigerated high traffic location, which may increase sales over poorly located refrigerated shelves."

Miller believes that the best places to promote cherries are in the front of the produce department and in the front of the

store. "The bigger the display, the better," Miller says. "Studies show that 6-ft. displays increase lift by ten percent, 9-ft. displays increase lift by 25 percent and 12-ft. displays increase lift by 65 percent!"

"From a product storage standpoint, refrigerated, dry tables are best," adds Plain of Family Tree Farms. "However, since the objective is selling rather than storing, build a display that is impressive and in full view of all customers in order to achieve high sales and quick product turnover."

"You want a big enough display so consumers can find them, good selection and a good blend of red and Rainier cherries," states CMI's Mast. "We recommend a 4- to 8-ft. display."

"And make sure to have plenty of cherries in the back room to restock the fast selling cherry display," adds Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for Rainier Fruit Co., headquartered in Selah, WA.

"But don't display cherries where sunlight can shine on them," warns Rick Austin, inter-

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Is Bing Still King?

When many consumers think of cherries, they think of the Bing variety. Next in mind are Rainiers, but there are many varieties of cherries on the market. "Some popular varieties are Chelan, Bing, Skeena, Sweet Heart and Rainier Cherries," details Roger Pepperl, marketing director at Stemilt Growers LLC, in Wenatchee, WA. "But Stemilt has the Sequoia, which is an early cherry in Mid-June, and Staccato — a very late cherry harvested up until Labor Day. California has Brooks, Tulare, Garnet, Coral, Bing and Sweet Heart."

Chuck Sinks, president of sales and marketing at Sage Fruit Co. LLC, headquartered in Yakima, WA, reveals, "Bing and Rainier are the most popular, but other varieties mature before or after to extend the season. If you promote dark sweet cherries and Rainier cherries together, it makes an excellent visual impact at retail and increases sales. Taste testing is another way to raise awareness of the many types of cherries available."

"Merchandising dark sweet and Rainier cherries together increases a consumer's visual awareness and often leads to increased purchases," agrees James Michael, promotion director for both the Washington State Fruit Commission and the Northwest Cherry Growers, based in Yakima, WA.

"Stock both Rainier and red cherries, as this strategy has repeatedly proven to maximize category contribution," advises Suzanne Wolter, director of marketing for Rainier Fruit Co., in Selah, WA.. "In weekly ads and on in-store POS, retailers should highlight the flavor and characteristics of Rainier cherries as 'Extra Sweet' and 'White Flesh.' Promote the Rainier cherry alongside the dark sweet cherry to maximize category dollar impact, and alongside other white-

national sales director at B. C. Tree Fruits Limited, headquartered in Kelowna, BC, Canada. “Too much sunlight can dry and shrivel stems.”

Spread Them Out

Secondary displays are also recommended as a way to catch the eye of those consumers who may not go into the produce department. “Place secondary displays near cash registers or near the entrance of store,” advises Sage’s Sinks. “The key is checking on these displays to make

sure they are well stocked.”

“Since cherries are a short season, we do front-end displays near the registers, in addition to the produce display,” describes Richard Noeth, senior vice president of fresh products at Gerland’s Food Fair, a five-unit chain based in Houston, TX. “We only do this during peak traffic hours, and then we put the cherries back in refrigeration during off hours, since they must be kept cold. These are smaller displays, about 20-50 pounds, or one to three cases.”

Loren Queen, marketing and communica-

tions manager of Yakima, WA-based Domex Superfresh Growers LLC, believes that secondary displays of cherries increase the category performance. “A waterfall at the display will help too,” he adds.

Michael of Northwest Cherry Growers has statistics to back up the importance of secondary cherry displays. “A study by the Northwest Cherry Growers and the Perishables Group in 2009 showed little variance in cherry purchase frequency between a consumer’s small trip purchases and large trip purchases,



fleshed stone fruit such as peaches and nectarines,” she says.

“Consumers don’t purchase based on the specific variety and are hard-pressed to notice a difference between dark sweet cherry varieties, so the quality of the cherries and their display play a much larger role than variety,” Loren Queen, marketing and communications manager of Yakima, WA-based Domex Superfresh Growers LLC, points out. “The one variety that does stand out is the Rainier cherry. Many consumers don’t understand what this variety is, so this is a huge opportunity to capture new sales in the cherry category. Noting that Rainier cherries are sweeter or less tart than dark sweet cherries can be a very effective tactic.”

Regardless of the variety, “a good cherry can become an addictive delight for consumers who will most likely buy again from wherever it is they bought those good quality cherries,” states Eric Crawford, president of Fresh Results LLC, in Sunrise, FL. **pb**

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“Retailers who run more than five promotions a season see the largest category contribution from Northwest cherries. Include holiday promotions, such as Memorial Day and the Fourth of July, which are the strongest cherry sales events of the summer.”

— Suzanne Wolter, Rainier Fruit Co.

so it's clear that when cherries are available, consumers are purchasing them,” he says. “Studies show that secondary displays, especially near the checkout stands, can increase volume sales by 13.6 percent and dollar volume by 22.4 percent.”

“Other beneficial places are on end aisles, but since it's fairly perishable, retailers need to maintain refrigeration and rotate displays as much as possible,” offers Jim Culbertson, executive manager for the Lodi-based California Cherry Advisory Board.

“Cherries are quite perishable, so contin-

uous change or rotation is very important,” agrees Rich Sambado, director of domestic sales at Primavera Marketing Inc., in Linden, CA.

Creative Cross-Merchandising And Promotional Pricing

Secondary displays are also great opportunities to cross-merchandise cherries, leading to an uptick in sales of other retail products. “Cherries are an excellent ingredient for certain salads,” asserts Sinks of Sage. “The bakery is also a natural fit for cherries, but consider cross-merchandising near the

meat department as well, as cherries have become a popular addition to meat recipes. The dairy department — ideally near the ice cream — is another area where cherries could be cross-merchandised.”

“Cherries can be cross-merchandised with picnic-type food displays in July, when retailers are at their best price points,” states Pepperl of Stemilt. “Customers looking for whole watermelons, a beverage and large snack food packages are also looking for larger purchases that can feed big groups, so the 3- or 4-lb. cherry clams does a great job supporting the needs of these consumers. Picnics are often impulsive and the decision can be easy for a customer if they see great quality cherries in this mix.”

CMI's Mast recalls, “We've had retailers put cherries with tart or pie shells, whipped cream, and in the cold case with yogurt. People are creatures of habit and will have yogurt with berries or granola, but another idea is to show consumers they can also have yogurt with cherries.”

But Plain of Family Tree Farms believes that cross-merchandising opportunities for cherries are not always apparent in the mind of the consumer. “Cherries don't yet have ‘instinctive’



David Simonian

December 28, 1946 - February 26, 2011

David Simonian, of Fowler, CA, passed away at home on Saturday, February 26, 2011. David graduated from Fowler High School with the class of 1964. Upon graduating from Fresno State College he took over his father's business, C.D. Simonian Insurance. He was also co-owner of Simonian Fruit Company in Fowler. He is survived by Patti, his wife of 34 years; sons, Jeffrey and Jonathan; daughter, Kristen; grand-dog, Capo; brother, Jim Simonian and his wife Eileen; aunts, Helen Avedisian and Gladys Avedisian; nephews; nieces; cousins; and many many wonderful friends.

IN MEMORIAM

As we all know the fruit business is a very fast moving business and can lead to misunderstandings related to quality or pricing. Dealing with David that was never a problem. In all the years we dealt with David I can never remember having a problem that we could not settle over the phone, put it behind us, and move on to the next order. Of all the shippers we dealt with over the years, David certainly ranks at the top.

I must also thank David for making me famous in Omaha. Since my retirement almost twenty years ago I no longer buy truckloads of his fruit, but I do buy one pallet of his O'Henry peaches that I give away to about 100 of my friends. They were always in a class by themselves. I hope David knows how famous and popular he made me in my hometown.

Besides being an outstanding shipper and grower, David was an ardent fan of baseball. Omaha is the home of the College World Series and the years that Fresno State came to Omaha, and there were many, we spent more time talking about why they won or lost their game the night before than we did about what he was selling or what I wanted to buy. I will never regret buying one package from David, but I will always feel badly that I was never able to talk David into coming to Omaha to sit with us at a Fresno State game. Hopefully Fresno State will return to Omaha for the series and he will certainly be there in my thoughts and maybe even be looking down and asking where the seat is that I always said I would be saving for him. **Don Greenberg**

“David was a very honorable and hard working man, who took pride in his relationships and set the standard of service for Simonian Fruit Company. And has always had some of the best apricots in memory...” **Susan Hance - Marketing Plus**

“A study by the Northwest Cherry Growers and the Perishables Group in 2009 shows that while cherries return more dollars per square foot than any other produce item, they average the second smallest allocation of shelf space. Cherries are the only item with a statistically strong correlation between increasing shelf-space and increasing dollar contribution.”

— James Michael, Washington State Fruit Commission/Northwest Cherry Growers

cross-merchandising options that are available with strawberries, such as with shortcake ingredients or bananas and vanilla wafers,” she points out. “Recipe suggestions that include cherries need a strong visual cue on the card, such as a picture of the finished product.”

“Not every ad has to be the lowest cherry price of the season, but the discount needs to be noticeable, usually a dollar or more off the regular retail price,” states Sinks of Sage.

“Cherries already have a built-in promotion advantage due to their seasonality and perceived specialness,” suggest Plain. “This can be maximized early in the season by ‘announcement’ ads and in-store signage. The California Cherry Advisory Board has POS material available that suggests freezing cherries. By pushing this concept, you’ll sell more now and allow the consumer to enjoy great cherry flavor after the season is over.”

“Buy-one-pound-get-one-free ads work well too,” acknowledges Mast. “Or promote cherries as a summer fruit. Somehow, limited time items appeal to consumers,” he adds.

“Retailers who run more than five promotions a season see the largest category contribution from Northwest cherries,” states Wolter of Rainier Fruit. “Include holiday promotions, such as Memorial Day and the



GARLIC SHOWCASE

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Fourth of July, which are the strongest cherry sales events of the summer.”

Highlight Health Benefits

Consumers often view cherries as expensive, but playing up the health benefits can help overcome this concern. So can promoting the many varieties and the deliciousness of cherries. “Consumers will spend a lot on pomegranates, but if they understood the health benefits of cherries, they may be willing to part with more dollars,” reasons Mast.

Wolter maintains consumers are turning on to the idea that cherries are a powerful, healthful snack. “Cherries are a great source of antioxidants that may prevent cancer, heart disease and Alzheimer’s,” she says. “They are

also high in potassium, have no fat or cholesterol, and, despite their sweet taste, have a very low glycemic index.”

“Our colorful display bins provide extra shelf space and are a great way to build on the health benefits and flavor,” says Stemilt’s Pepperl. “Bring the grower into the store, and use a QR Code for smart phone users to find out more about cherries and our family-owned company that grows and ships them. Stemilt also does a grower-centric signage program that can be customized for individual customers. All retailers should consider bringing the ‘More Matters’ logo into their cherry merchandising programs, as cherries are considered a superfood.”

“Even in difficult economic times,

consumers have shown that they are willing to splurge a little for something that is only a seasonal event,” points out Plain of Family Tree Farms. “Knowing that cherries have many health benefits is one way to soften any sticker shock. The other is to make sure the product tastes fantastic.”

“I would call them an affordable luxury,” describes Michael of Washington State Fruit Commission/Northwest Cherry Growers. “On average, cherry consumers are more affluent, better educated purchasers who spend more than average shoppers. In 2010, the cherry category contributed 4.5 percent to the produce department from June through August.”

“When you consider that last year, cherries

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sold for less than \$3 a pound, compared to cookies at about \$3.50 a pound, and the 100-calorie pack snacks of various items are as high as \$10 a pound, then cherries are not expensive," declares Miller of Rivermaid Trading.

"Perhaps early in the season they're expensive, but in the peak of the season prices come down," adds Bashas' Armstrong.

Taste Sells

"Flavor is key to repeat sales," says Miller. "The science behind it shows that the higher the Brix, the slower the respiration rate, and the firmer the cherry, the longer the shelf-life."

"Everyone loves sweet cherries, so we harvest cherries at the peak of maturity," says Sinks of Sage. "Allowing fruit to mature on the

tree results in higher Brix levels than fruit that is harvested too early, which can lead to repeat sales. If a consumer has a positive experience the likelihood of a repeat purchase is high."

"Brix, pressure and firmness all have to go together," explains Eric Crawford, president of Fresh Results LLC, in Sunrise, FL. "A good cherry has to be sweet and crunchy."

Taste is dependent on how cherries are stored. "Cherries should be pre-cooled and refrigerated as much as possible," advises Austin of B. C. Tree Fruits. "Cherries can lose more quality in one hour at 68 degrees than in 24 hours at 32 degrees. Also, avoid heavy watering or sprinkling, as cherries absorb water, which makes them go soft earlier."

"Also, make sure they get good rotation,"

adds CMI's Mast. "By the end of the evening, keep a minimal amount out and the rest in a cooler in the back."

Rainier's Wolter details the process. "The key to cherry quality is maintaining the cold chain, which begins in the orchard with portable hydro-coolers and refrigerated trailers. Cherries should never be left on an unrefrigerated loading dock or on a truck with doors opened for any length of time. Store personnel should be trained to advise consumers to refrigerate the cherries once they get them home to maintain firmness and flavor."

"Some training of personnel to handle cherries in season is extremely important," agrees Culbertson of the California Cherry Advisory Board.

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Eight Ripe Ways To Sell Tree Fruit Year-Round

Seamless year-round supply and varietal development that delivers on flavor is creating ripe sales opportunities for stone fruit. **BY CAROL M. BAREUTHER, RD**



Peaches and nectarines makes up 60 percent of the nation's stone fruit crop, say suppliers.

“**O**ur winter stone fruit sales equate to more than 6 percent of our total sales and have grown to be a very important part of our regular everyday winter business,” reports Scott Schuette, produce category manager for Sunflower Farmer’s Markets, a 32-store chain based in Boulder, CO. “Stone fruit sales are also the anchor of our summer months, the foundation of our ads and the draw that brings in a majority of our customers.”

The stone fruit category contributed 2.3 percent to produce department dollar sales during the 52-week period ending January 29, 2011, according to the Perishables Group, a West Dundee, IL-based market research firm that tracks and analyzes retail sales data of fresh foods.

1. Base The Category Around Peaches And Nectarines

Peaches and nectarines are the sales leaders in the stone fruit category, contributing 46.9 percent and 29.2 percent of dollar sales, respectively, during the 52 weeks ending January 29, 2011, according to the Perishables Group.

Dave Parker, director of marketing for

Traver, CA-based Scattaglia Growers & Shippers LLC, reports, “Peach and nectarine production in California, which produces some 60 percent of the nation’s stone fruit, are about neck-and-neck at 40 percent each. However, it’s easier to grow peaches in different climates than nectarines or plums, which is one of the reasons peaches are the stone fruit leader from a national perspective.”

South Carolina is second to California in peach production. Amy London, executive director of the Columbia-based South Carolina Peach Council (SCPC), says, “The locavore movement here is strong, especially for the freestone peaches that come in around the end of June. We’ll typically start harvest mid-May, which is usually earlier than California, and this helps us get our product out to retailers and preferentially in-store.”

“Demand for locally grown, combined with the increased costs of trucking fruit across the nation, are what gives eastern peaches a marketing edge with retailers in the region,” maintains Phil Neary, director of operations and grower relations for Glassboro, NJ-based Sunny Valley International Inc. “We’ve worked to widen the window of

availability by setting up programs with growers in both South Carolina and New Jersey so that we can make just-in-time or overnight deliveries to our retail partners from mid-May through mid-September.”

Ohio-grown peaches are a big draw at Dorothy Lane Markets, a three-store chain based in Dayton, OH. “The big draw,” says Jose Manzano, director of produce, “is the flavor and outstanding quality. The peaches come from one grower located about 25 to 30 miles away from our stores. It’s something our customers look forward to each year and something that definitely adds to our total department sales.”

Yellow-fleshed peaches and nectarines rule in production over white-fleshed varieties, both domestically and in imports. Dovey Plain, marketing coordinator for Reedley, CA-based Family Tree Farms Marketing LLC, reveals, “The supplies of white-flesh peaches and nectarines versus yellow-flesh seems to have leveled off at around 25 percent of the total crop.”

However, Sunflower Markets’ Schuette counters, “Trends we see in white-flesh items include stronger customer recognition, lower everyday retail price points within our



2. Offer Multiple Varieties Of Plums & Pluots

Plums contributed 21.1 percent of stone fruit category dollar sales during the 52 weeks ending January 29, 2011, according to the Perishables Group.

"Interest in plums versus plum-apricot hybrids such as pluots and plumcots tends to be regional," contends Rogers. "East Coast retailers sell more pluots than plums, but as you move west, plums become the focus."

According to Kenfield, "Consumers have moved away from plums in recent years because of the predominance of older varieties that don't deliver on flavor. As a result, we've dedicated a huge amount of research to plums and foresee significant growth opportunities for this fruit in the next six to seven years."

Currently, pluots are becoming the fast favorites. Ed Osowski, director of produce and floral for Martin's Supermarkets, a 20-store chain based in South Bend, IN, details, "We do a big push each year on pluots, which have really have come to dominate the category over plums."

Sunflower Markets' Schuette adds, "The pluot category is making the traditional plum a fruit of the past. We hosted six varieties of pluots this past season that generated \$129,000

company and in the competition, more frequent advertising of the white-flesh items, improved POS information available, and much higher sales. We gained 23 percent in sales of white-flesh fruit last season."

Brian Rogers, director of sales for the southern region for Dinuba, CA-based Fruit Patch Sales LLC, adds, "White-flesh peaches and nectarines tend to be more popular among Asian customers."

"Mid-Atlantic retailers tend to do a good job of educating their clients and hence, sell more white-fleshed fruit," recognizes Steve

Kenfield, vice president of marketing and business development for the Kingsburg, CA-based The HMC Group Marketing Inc.

Best practice research conducted in 2010 by San Ramon, CA-based Encore Associates in cooperation with the Reedley, CA-based California Tree Fruit Agreement (CTFA) based on retail ad activity collected from May to October 2009, reveals that Best in Class retailers have higher shares of white-fleshed peaches and nectarines, as well as higher shares of plums, suggesting greater variety sells more product.

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It is advantageous to offer multiple varieties of pluots and call them out by name. Family Tree Farms' Plain says, "Rarely will you find a consumer who knows a peach or nectarine variety name. For the most part, it's just a choice between yellow and white. It's similar with plums — black or red — since that is how they are inevitably signed at retail. Progressive retailers are stepping up when it comes to marketing plumcots by variety. Even if it's just a sign that says 'Plumcot' and the variety name, that tells consumers there is something unique here and that they should pay attention to this sign in the future."

3. Expand The Category

This past year, Sunflower Markets' offered customers Donut Peaches, Mango Nectarines and Black Apricots, says Schuette. "Next season, we hope to re-introduce these items and bring customers back to them for expanded growth."

"Like apples and tomatoes, the stone fruit category is ripe for expansion," recognizes Dan Spain, vice president of sales and marketing for Kingsburg, CA-based Kingsburg Orchards. One of Kingsburg's newest hybrids is the Peach-a-rine, a 50/50 cross between a peach and nectarine. "We'll offer 10 varieties that span the season from May through September," he details.

Similarly, Kingsburg offers eight different varieties of apriums, a cross between an apricot and a plum. These are available from May through late July or early August.

"On the apricot front," Plain says, "we see a lot of growth opportunity and are working with some of our European fruit breeding partners to plant trees that will bring that European flavor profile to the domestic market. While those varieties are a few years out still, we are priming the pump right now with really great early summer varieties like Apache and Earlicot."

4. Consider Organics

"Organic stone fruit is a small but growing part of the category," says HMC's Kenfield. It represented 1.7 percent of category dollar sales for the 52-week period ending January 29, 2011, according to the Perishables Group.

"One fact that may blunt consumer interest, however, is price," points out Fruit Patch's Rogers. "On average, organic stone fruit costs between 20 to 50 cents more per pound. In this economy, it is often more about dollars than organic appeal for many shoppers."

Another hindrance to sales is appearance. Tom Tjerandsen, the Sonoma, CA-based spokesperson for the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association (CFFA), acknowledges, "Cosmetics mean everything, and it can be harder to grow a clean piece of organic fruit."

5. Sell Flavorful Fruit

"While the days of rock-hard, flavorless fruit are not completely a thing of the past, their days are numbered," says Family Tree Farm's Plain. "Retailers, growers and shippers all understand the importance of picking at full maturity."

Ripeness at harvest, not at retail, is the critical issue, says Denver Schutz, technical services manager at Gerawan Farming Inc., headquartered in Sanger, CA. "Fruit must be picked at optimum maturity in order to deliver the best eating experience possible. Stone fruit that is already mature must be stored in a high humidity environment between 32 to 35° F until being placed in an unrefrigerated display. Stone fruit should never be stored in the killing zone, which is between 36 to 50° F. Killing zone temperatures will cause off-flavors and meanness. If fruit is not picked at a high enough level of maturity, it will never deliver what the customer wants, no matter what is done in an attempt to ripen it post-harvest."

"Much confusion exists over descriptions such as tree-ripe and pre-conditioned," says Gary Van Sickle, CTFA president. "The best way to assure good tasting fruit is for retailers to spell out several specifications such as color, pressure and Brix, as well as size, variety and other basics."

"However, many retailers get hung up and rigid on Brix levels," admits Kenfield. "Brix — or sugars — is just one element, and the other is acid. It's the Brix-to-acid ratio that makes fruit taste great. For example, you can have a low Brix and low acid piece of fruit and it will still taste great."

6. Mix It Up — Bulk And Packaged

"Consumers like to use their senses when it comes to purchasing stone fruit," says John Thiesen, operations manager for Giumarra Bros Fruit Co. Inc., based in Los Angeles, CA. "Touch and smell are important factors for determining ripeness and eating quality. Packaging works best for selling larger quantities of fruit at a time, but an open pack is preferable to a closed container."

"Last season," recalls Schuette, "we attempted to sell peaches and nectarines in cello bags, but could not convince the customer of the value the bag represented. Our consumers seem to be in favor of hand-selecting the very

“Summer stone fruit retails on aggressive ads can be up to 60 percent less than retails on the winter stone fruit, therefore we need much more square footage of display area to keep the items in stock during these aggressive summer promotions.”

— Scott Schuette, Sunflower Farmer's Markets

fragile tree fruit one at a time. We will try again this season to offer some stone fruit packages that represent an extreme value for customers that buy pre-packaged fruit.”

Sunny Valley's Neary adds, “We've explored every way to pack a peach such as 4- and 6-lb. boxes, 2- and 3-lb. high-graphic bags similar to those for Clementines, and 3½-lb. totes. Many retailers like to differentiate themselves through packaging.”

A ‘basket pack’ is something that Family Tree Farms has seen success with,” says Plain. “It's packed with approximately two pounds of fruit, but it's still a PLU-based, random-weight sale. It's a great pack for smaller fruit, such as apricots or small sizes of pluicots.”

This season, Kingsburg Orchards will offer two new pack styles. One is a 1.5-lb. display-ready bag and the second in a high-graphic 2- to 3-lb. cardboard box.”

Fruit Patch will be testing “a four-count clamshell pack with, for example, two peaches and two nectarines or two peaches, one nectarine and one plum,” reveals Rogers.

7. Build Destination And Secondary Displays

“All stone fruit is displayed in one destination that's equivalent to 20 linear feet in the peak domestic season at Martin's Supermarkets,” details Osowski. “However, if we're highlighting a particular item, be it a pluot, apricot or high-flavor peach, we'll single it out with a display of its own.”

Displays change seasonally at Sunflower Markets. “In the winter,” says Schuette, “stone fruit displays take on a satellite approach to merchandising, meaning that they become more of an impulse display in several high-traffic satellite locations. We use multiple 1-by-4 ft. merchandising displays that flank the corners of our seasonal fruit tables. This enables the winter tree fruit to be separated from the many other seasonal fruits, making it easier for customers to find. During promotions, the displays are expanded to 4-by-4 feet and moved into front-store lobby locations and center produce department

buy locations.”

“In the summer,” Schuette continues, “displays occupy a permanent table fixture location that is a destination spot. Summer stone fruit retails on aggressive ads can be up to 60 percent less than retails on the winter stone fruit, therefore we need much more square footage of display area to keep the items in stock during these aggressive summer promotions.”

“Make sure displays include each segment of the stone fruit category,” advises Family Tree Farm's Plain. “This includes yellow peaches, yellow nectarines, white peaches, white nectarines, red plums, black plums and pluicots. Within pluicots, there are many opportunities throughout the summer to stock two or more varieties to showcase the diversity of this segment. As specialty products like flat peaches, apricots and apriums become available, these should be added to the mix with some type of feature location within the display.

“Restocking and rotating is crucial,” adds Gerawan's Schutz. “The display should not be stacked more than two-layers deep, and fruit firmness should be monitored regularly so riper fruit can be placed on top and toward the front.”

The CFFA's Tjerandsen recommends, “Since stone fruit is a high-impulse purchase, catch consumers' eyes by using techniques such as color breaks, waterfall displays and informative signage.”

8. Promote Year-Round

Stone fruit contribution to total produce sales is highest from June through September, reaching 6.1 percent the weekend ending August 28, 2010, while contribution is lowest in November and December, according to the Perishables Group.

“It can pay to promote the category year-round, especially since supply is seamless,” acknowledges Tjerandsen. “This is due to three things. First, growers have pioneered research on early and late season varieties that have expanded marketing windows; technology enables growers to maintain these

varieties and ship them successfully over longer distances; and new growing areas are developing around the world that are providing supply to fill gaps.”

Winter stone fruit promotions at Sunflower Markets are used as secondary features in the weekly ad flyer and on-line promotions, according to Schuette. “Winter promotions are often a ‘mix-and-match’ strategy, which encourages our customers to pick from multiple winter stone fruit items and winter grapes all at the same retail,” he explains. “Our last winter stone fruit promotion of this year included Chilean peaches, nectarines, plums, Bartlett pears and grapes all at the sub-feature retail of two pounds for \$3, which compared to regular retails that ranged from \$1.99 to \$2.49 the week prior. The ad promotion was a big success, giving the total category a 43 percent boost in sales.”

In the summer, multiple stone fruit items are run in one big ad at Martin's Supermarkets. However, our biggest success is in promoting a single item that has high Brix, flavor and aromatics — the whole package — and telling its story — where it came from, who grew it and what makes it special,” details Osowski.

Top tips for promotions, revealed in the CFTA's 2010-published Best Practice research, include actively promoting peaches, nectarines and plums using ‘everyday’ prices and aggressive/low ‘promotional’ pricing; promoting throughout the entire season, but saving the biggest events and highest ad frequency for July and August; and including plums with a combination of either yellow-flesh peaches and white-flesh nectarines or white-flesh peaches and yellow-flesh nectarines on promotion to achieve the best sales velocity.

“Theme promotions can also be effective,” maintains Kingsburg's Spain. “We'll run a ‘white sale’ with retailers featuring our white-flesh varieties and a ‘gold rush’ promotion with our proprietary yellow-flesh fruit.”

This season, the SCPC will partner with Beverly Hills, CA-based Anchor Bay Entertainment, creator of the Wow Wow Wubbzy character, on a promotion where consumers can receive a \$3 rebate with the purchase of three pounds of South Carolina peaches and copy of the DVD, Wow Wow Wubbzy Saves the Day, which will be released May 3, 2011. “The promotion is targeted to 3- to 6-year-old children and their parents,” says London of the SCPC, “and offers a first-time opportunity for us to tie in a healthy fruit like South Carolina peaches with a character that's popular in this age group. It's a win-win.”

pb

Portable Snacks Pack A Nutritious Punch

With a focus on health-conscious, on-the-go consumers, dried fruit and nuts are stealing the spotlight as portable snacks. **BY BOB JOHNSON**



PHOTO COURTESY OF MARIANI PACKING CO. INC.

Packaging that is convenient to carry and showcases what's inside, as well as attention-drawing displays, are the keys to reaching the market for healthful snacks.

Dried fruits and nuts continue to gain in popularity as consumers embrace them as convenient snack foods that fit with a healthful life style. "The dried fruit category is at \$633 million, and has increased two percent as a total category," reports Joe Tamble, vice president of sales at Kingsburg, CA-based Sun-Maid Growers. "This category has continued to grow for at least 10 years."

The keys to the continued growth of the dried fruit category, according to Tamble, are the development of new products and effective promotions. "It has been driven by new items that have come from the major producers like Sun-Maid, Ocean Spray, Sunsweet and Mariani," he says.

The proliferation of new and nutritious snack products includes nuts, dried fruits and combinations of the two. "In the past, consumers viewed dried fruits and nuts as a baking item, but now, they are more health-conscious and expanding their horizons," says Stephanie Blackwell, owner and CEO of Aurora Products, headquartered in Stratford,

CT. "There are also more varieties out there, such as trail mixes and seasoned nuts."

What's New Under The Sun?

It is worth paying attention to the steady stream of new dried fruit and nut products, as these new products are piquing consumer interest and driving the category. Sun-Maid has recently released new items such as vanilla yogurt covered raisins, mixed golden raisins and dried cherries and a Tropical Trio that includes dried pineapple, mango and papaya. Ocean Spray has come out with dried blueberries and dried cherries. Sunsweet Ones is another new product, and this year, Mariani Packing introduced a package that is easier to reseal than zip-locks.

"We're getting more creative, and coming up with new versions of fruit snacks," acknowledges Andrew Stillman, president of Amport Foods, in Minneapolis, MN. "Now consumers are finding more items with cherries, cranberries and blueberries in addition to prunes, raisins and apricots. They are seeing yogurt covered products and more nut mixes."

As the market for healthful snacks grows,

producers keep coming up with new items. For example, "Dried cranberries are the No. 2 dried fruit category segment and growing, which means that consumers have made this item a regular part of their diet," explains Miranda Ackerman, marketing director and brand manager at Vacaville, CA-based Mariani Packing Co. Inc.

One producer believes a new trend is coming to the texture of dried fruit products. "I think the dried fruit category is moving into a more crispy direction," reveals Brad Oberwager, CEO of Bare Fruit LLC, headquartered in Walnut, CA. "For this reason, we sell and are further developing apple chips as an alternative to the traditional dried fruit. Unlike the freeze-dried substitutes, apple chips, which are baked-dried, are much more filling and a better value for consumers. The ring is higher for retail and everyone is happy."

Dried tomatoes — yes, tomatoes are a fruit — are also benefiting from the development of new flavor profiles. "At Mooney Farms, we feel it is important to be innovative and introduce new items that fit the needs of today's consumers," states Maryellen Mooney, owner

“Salads are a driving force; so many people are putting dried fruits such as blueberries, cherries and golden raisins in salads... We have 3-oz. packages of dried cranberries, cherries and blueberries merchandised by the salads, and it’s all impulse buys.”

—Keith Fetterolf, Foodland

and president of Mooney Farms, located in Chico, CA. “Our new Bella Sun Luci Julianne Sun Dried Tomatoes with Italian Basil & Zesty Peppers are fat- and sugar-free, kosher, and have no added salt. These items are packed in resealable pouches.”

There are even new trends in the classic peanut category. “The biggest change in the peanut category has been that they are flavored now, not just roasted and salted,” maintains Bob Sutter, CEO of the Nashville-based North Carolina Peanut Growers Association.

New And Improved Packaging

A key to reaching the market for healthy snacks is to have packaging that makes the product convenient to carry, and displays that draw attention to these snacks. “Dried fruit in resealable packaging is an excellent and nutritious snack that is perfect for on-the-go consumers,” says Ackerman. “Our grocery-sized resealable packages are great for in-home consumption, as well as to have on hand in the office, in a purse, briefcase or gym bag.”

As consumers consider dried fruits and nuts as nutritious on-the-go snack options, smaller packages are becoming more popular. “On certain items, we’re seeing more demand for smaller sizes because people want to take it with them,” reports Robert Henarie, vice president of sales at Texas Star Nut & Food Co. Inc., based in Bourne, TX.

The smaller packages can be tailored to contain a certain number of calories, or even a single-serving of fruits under nutritional guidelines. “Our single-serve portions are often calibrated to specific caloric limits, such as 100 calories per box, as well as offering consumers fruit servings and recommended daily vitamin intakes,” details Jane Asmar, vice president for sales and marketing at National Raisin Co., Fowler, CA.

Early this year, one major producer rolled out a new dried fruit package that should be easier to close than the traditional zip lock. “Consumers get frustrated when traditional resealable zippers don’t close upon first try,”

acknowledges Joe Flannigan, vice president for sales and marketing at Mariani. “Alignment has to be just right to work properly. When this doesn’t happen, it makes for an unhappy consumer, and ultimately, the brand experience with that consumer can be compromised.”

Mariani’s trademarked TouchLock packaging, with self-gripping micro-hooks, does not have to be perfectly aligned to seal properly. “As long as the micro-hooks on the sides touch, you’ll get the bond you need to reseal your bag and keep your dried fruit fresh,” explains Ackerman.

Put ‘Em In Produce

Another key to the emergence of dried fruits and nuts has been the increasing trend of placing them in the produce department, where they are better displayed. When dried fruits are moved to the produce department, according to Tamble, sales can increase as much as 30 percent.

There are many places to display dried fruits and nuts in the produce department, and near the salad mixes is an excellent choice. “Salads are a driving force; so many people are putting dried fruits such as blueberries, cherries and golden raisins in salads,” says Keith Fetterolf, produce manager at Foodland, based in Lebanon, PA. “You also see people putting almonds in salads. We have 3-oz. packages of dried cranberries, cherries and blueberries merchandised by the salads, and it’s all impulse buys.”

Dried fruit and nuts have become so popular in salads that some producers have created products specifically to be included in salads. “We’re coming out with additional ways to use these items, such as salad toppings, and we like to cross-merchandise,” says Blackwell of Aurora.

Placement near the salads also encourages purchase of both dried fruits and nuts as convenient snacks. “The local nut companies are mixing different kinds of nuts together, and we sell a variety of different size packages,” Fetterolf reveals.

Some producers also supply a variety of

produce department display options. “The new flavors of sun dried tomatoes can be found merchandised in the produce department either on a clip strip or hanging on one of our custom racks,” details Mooney of Mooney Farms.

Mariani also has display racks suitable for permanent placement of dried fruit snacks as end caps within the produce department. “The best way to draw attention to these snack foods items in the produce department is to provide a destination via rack display or other merchandising vehicles,” asserts Mariani’s Ackerman. “This provides consumers a consistent place to look for healthy dried fruit and snack items, and a continued place to shop on their repeated trips to the grocery store.”

Nutritious Snacking Options

Some producers are coming out with dried fruit and nut products that offer more healthful versions of familiar kids snacks. “Fruit snacks have a small amount of fruit and a lot of sugar. We’re working on an item that is similar to fruit snacks, but healthy,” Blackwell says.

There are also new raisin products that parallel the flavors of sour candy favorites. “National Raisins is rolling out Raisels, a five SKU line of Sour Flavored Golden Raisins available in 1¼-oz. 6-pack boxes,” says Asmar.

Nuts have taken off in the past couple of decades as they, too, have emerged as nutritious snack options. “The category is growing because of the reputation of the health benefits of nuts,” says Henarie of Texas Star. “Almonds are typically one of our best sellers, but all nuts are good for you.”

The traditional peanut is also benefiting, thanks to discoveries about the nutritional value of virtually all nuts. “What’s changed is that peanuts — and nuts in general — are being included in healthy diets,” adds Sutter of the North Carolina Peanut Growers Association. “We are not just concerned about fat, but about what kind of fat. We promote peanuts as a healthy snack.”

The key to keeping the category growing is for dried fruit and nut producers to continue spreading the word about the nutritional value of these foods. “As long as the major producers can bring home the educational message about how nutritious dried fruits are, the category will keep expanding,” says Tamble of Sun-Maid.

A major part of this ongoing educational effort is accomplished in the produce department, “via on-pack and consumer advertising, as well as our POP messaging,” details Ackerman. “Communicating usage tips to consumers helps to create dried fruit snacking as an integral part of consumers’ diet.” **pb**

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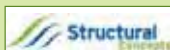
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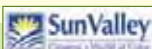
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Focus On Care And Handling

Beyond pinching pennies, floral retailers will want to emphasize to store level personnel the value of following basic care and handling procedures. **BY E. SHAUNN ALDERMAN**



As summer begins, review outdoor watering schedules to prevent floral inventory loss.

When financially watching the bottom line to prevent shrink and other elements nibbling at floral department profits, where can retailers turn to refresh their knowledge on care and handling? The information age is no longer new, but the expanse of available care and handling info for retailers and consumers can be overwhelming. Nonetheless, retailers cannot afford to ignore valuable tips and suggestions that can save money and help maintain their operations' reputation for offering quality products.

While some chains may rely on vendor-generated care material, others seek downloadable information from the Internet that can be published in store training manuals. Bill Schodowski, national sales development with Delaware Valley Floral Group (DVFG) headquartered in Sewell, NJ, is a long-time industry member with years of wisdom. Schodowski travels extensively to industry events, trade shows and floral happenings where he is often a speaker. Additionally, he manages to distribute a frequent newsletter through e-mail containing helpful information. Care and handling suggestions are consistently included and often requested by his customers and readers.

In a recent Care and Handling offering about roses, Schodowski mentions product quality, temperature control, cleanliness, flower food and proper hydration. He nutshells his suggestions here: "Buy quality. Proper C&H (care and handling) only enhances good quality product. Good C&H does nothing for inferior quality product. Refrigerate. Store product at 34-37° as a rule of thumb. Clean buckets, tables and tools. The most beautiful flowers are negatively affected by dirty buckets, tools, etc. Use flower food correctly. Measure correctly and use the right product for the right use. Change with the times. In the 1980s, the industry advocated warm water hydration as product was cut super tight. Now it's cold water hydration as most product is cut as the breeder recommends." Schowdoski quickly gives credit to industry experts: "In truth....all of my suggestions are things borrowed from the true experts like George Staby [founder of Chain of Life Network, Pioneer, CA.], Terril Nell, [of the University of Florida in Gainesville, FL], Gay Smith [of Chrysal USA in Miami, FL] and my friends at Floralife [in Walterboro, SC]."

Consultant's View

Ted Johnson, owner of budandbranch enterprises, a floral consultancy based in

Media, PA, has worked in the floral industry for more than 25 years. He's been involved on the supplier/importer side as well as retail and mass market organizations. Related to care and handling, Johnson offers his observations: "Where are your stores placing plants and flowers both for display and during unloading/and potting? On store visits, I have seen the incoming pallets of boxed flowers sitting next to the front window, baking in the sun. And what happens if they don't finish the job? The product, now nice and warm, is returned to the cooler for the next staff person or for finishing tomorrow. Ouch!" Johnson reminds retailers, "Temperature is the No. 1 variable of display and subsequent customer vase life. Encourage store personnel to keep as much product as they can in the back cooler while they are cutting and hydrating in the department. Sure it is an extra step, but it is essential to managing shrink. This also is the time to review with staff their watering schedule of outdoor products as you experience those early hot days. Even experienced staff members can forget they now have a few thousand dollars of inventory outside."

Johnson continues, "Review how full stores are filling shelves and especially buckets with product. The temptation is to fill each shelf and bucket full once and for all to save time and

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What Do Consumers Want To Know About Care And Handling?

As a former florist and floral industry member for more than 30 years, the Upper Marlboro, MD-based Dottie Harrigan is fanatical about promoting flowers. Self-dubbed as The Flower Godmother, Harrigan believes the common industry goal should be to, “sell more flowers to more people for more reasons — far more often.”

Harrigan asserts retailers should strongly consider care and handling when building the floral category through customer loyalty. She says consumers in the United States often lack knowledge and confidence about flowers because they did not grow up in a culture where having flowers in the home is an everyday happening. In her distributed online publication, *Blooms — Living with Flowers Throughout the Year*, Harrigan includes this segment: “Flower lovers always ask how to care for their cut blooms: Can I cut with clippers or do I have to use a knife? Do I really have to cut all the stems under water? Should I put my arrangement in the refrigerator at night? If I don’t have flower food, can’t I just add sugar, soda, bleach, pennies ... to the vase?” Retailers have most likely heard these same questions for years, but how are they answering them?

Written with whimsy and sincerity, Harrigan continues the section with a list of 12 care and handling suggestions for consumers inviting flowers into their homes. Here are two shortened examples of her “edu-taining” style:

1. **Can I take your wrap?** Generally speaking, the packaging and wrappings that comes with flowers — whether they are shipped raw in a box, picked from a market in bouquets, or designed and from the florist — are meant only to protect the flowers while in transport. Outer wrappings can hold heat and moisture too close to your flowers, causing decay and shortening their vase life.

2. **What can I get you to drink?** Generally speaking, clean clear water — if you wouldn’t drink it, don’t expect your flowers to — is the most important thing you can give your flowers to make them happy and promote long life.”

Harrigan encourages retailers to log on to her www.flowerlovermagic.com site and use the care and handling information in their efforts to educate their floral customers. “My wish for retailers is for them to tap the information I’m offering and put their own spin on it.” **pb**

space. However, a bucket’s offering filled too tightly sustains damage as the flowers open and take up water. A bucket that is too full also allows more damage as customers lift and return a product to the bucket. The damaged foliage created will be prone to begin to decay in the water, only further accelerating the deterioration of the product.”

The floral department can learn merchandising techniques from the produce department, according to Johnson, but he warns stacking plants and flowers is not a good practice because it can promote shrink. He acknowledges proper merchandising as a step in care and handling and wants store personnel to think of presentation in those terms.

California Perspective

Kasey Cronquist, CEO/ambassador of the Santa Barbara-based California Cut Flower Commission (CCFC), says, “The first step to proper care of flowers is purchasing flowers

that are as fresh from the farm as possible and that have followed proper post-harvest and cold chain delivery. California flowers are best positioned to fulfill such quality requirements because they do not have to sit on two tarmacs prior to being trucked to their destination.”

For retailers hosting cross-merchandising events promoting California Grown products, the CCFC encourages them to direct consumers to the commission’s Web site. “We hold a really strong library of floral products on the site,” Cronquist mentions. He says retailers seeking quality as a first step will want to learn seasonality. “Retailers can see when the varieties are growing, who the farmers are and the origin of the floral material.” Cronquist believes this type of information educates retailers so they don’t just buy flowers based solely on price. “They learn when buying floral material from California that we are logistically able to

“Do not ship through distribution centers (DCs) that have banana ripening rooms because ethylene escapes.”

-- George Staby, Ph.D., Chain Life Network

accomplish what’s necessary to provide quality. It starts at the farm and our growers strictly adhere to correct post-harvest practices including keeping the cold chain.” The CCFC credits the Flower Promotion Organization of Minnetonka, MN, for providing the care and handling information that is published under the Flower Lovers section on the site.

George Staby, Ph.D., founder of Chain of Life Network and co-founder and president of Perishables Research Organization, both based in Pioneer, CA, is officially retired, but continues to organize or lead projects when the floral industry needs his assistance. His first care and handling suggestion for retailers is to “order by variety not just by color.” Staby explains, “When produce managers order apples they do not say, ‘Ship me 50 boxes of red apples.’ Instead, they buy by variety. We seldom do that in floral, but we should.” He adds, “You can be sure when Dole and Fresh Express sell those bagged salads, retailers know what types of lettuce are in the mixes. In floral, retailers generally have no clue about flower variety names in mixed bouquets.”

Relating to his first suggestion, Staby’s second point for retailers is to “be aware of ethylene sensitivity and which flower species/varieties are ethylene sensitive.” He could — and has — spoken for an hour on this topic, but believes it cannot be over emphasized to retailers concerned about offering quality floral products while managing their budgets. Strengthening his stance on awareness about ethylene sensitivity and never afraid of controversy, Staby suggests, “Do not ship through distribution centers (DCs) that have banana ripening rooms because ethylene escapes.” However, Staby says this practice is okay if an anti-ethylene treatment procedure (such as administering MCP or STS) is a strictly followed routine. Retailers will find the www.chainoflifenet.org site offers information on ethylene sensitivity and in the Floral Crop Specifics section as well as Frequently Asked Questions and Post-harvest and Marketing Library Database. **pb**

THE PRICING CONUNDRUM



Mix perishable fruit with retailers looking for promotions, grower/shippers trying to calculate production volume and then offer pricing in advance to anxious retailers. Threading the needle perfectly is a nearly impossible task. Price too high and ad promotions may not generate consumer volume sufficient to sell greater than anticipated volume. Quickly the market declines to a level below what it

should have been with initial lower priced promotions as pressure builds to ship rising storage inventories of the highly perishable product. Then the second guessing begins as growers face declining returns for a substantial percentage of the harvest.

On the other hand, early promotional pricing that is too low may result in overselling actual production with producers feeling they lost money from what could have been, especially if the pricing is below their estimated breakeven cost of production.

In general, everyone in agricultural production, as well as the middleman and retailers alike, face this problem. However for growers of cherries, who harvest their crop just prior to the Fourth of July holiday, the answer is particularly vexing. One would think the risks are so high for making money, the number of acres in production would show little or no increase.

But looking at the last decade, the trend has been increasing steadily with the year-to-year production trend nearly doubling on a fluctuating growth basis due to differing weather influences.

Obviously, grower commentary about hypothetical losses may be more bark than bite. The actuality in evaluating profitability is what counts. It is one thing to make a judgment based on both fixed and variable production costs and another to base the results on the cash flow generated after including only the production costs incurred.

When looking at only annual production costs, it is very tempting to want to expand the production base. When one begins to amortize fixed expenses, such as land — without taking into account land value growth, then the answer to expansion and the focus on particular marketing programs may be entirely different.

Regardless, risk is always present. My memory reminds me of a situation several decades earlier when the Northwest cherry crop was slightly later than average, with early supply and pricing forecasted for Fourth of July at levels that would not support the desired promo-

tional pricing of \$.99 per pound. Promotions for the holiday were limited, and not unexpectedly, growers quickly found themselves with bulging inventories of finally maturing product and a market dropping \$10-15 a box almost overnight, as retailers turned to alternative items. The result was grower return well below the average they should have expected.

But this situation also applies to other items that have peak sales at respective holidays. The situation most frequently coming to mind is the promotion of strawberries around the Easter holiday prior to 2000. Producers attempted to maximize promotional pricing for the high demand promotional holiday and then could not seem to understand after the holiday passed why demand would be much lower. Retailers were compensating for the previous margin squeeze with higher retail.

With one of the most perishable items, shippers were once again forced to compensate by dropping prices drastically to stimulate additional movement. Although holiday promotional programs tend to follow a particular pattern, it is the following weeks that also require promotion to achieve supply/demand equilibrium. However, given the growth of the berry category, it appears marketing solutions are possible to achieve satisfactory grower returns.

Perhaps the value of promotional pricing around and immediately following the holidays should be viewed as an

investment for stimulating future consumer interest. This is when consumer interest is at its peak and becomes a key for future increased demand.

Retailers have one advantage specialty growers don't have: the diversification from the hundreds of items enables them to achieve budgeted sales and profits. It is this creative ability to make adjustments within the total mix that overcomes supply and cost distortions.

On the other hand, producers confronting variances between projections and actuality may have dramatic effects on profitability. Overcoming these is far more difficult and complex.

In this day, with the ability to have almost instant communications, the better retailers and grower/shippers understand each other's business models, then the greater the opportunity to develop programs that can overcome a portion of the pricing conundrum. Perhaps then production will revolve over time at levels that can provide acceptability for growers, retailers and satisfied consumers.

pb

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By Dave Diver

Dave Diver is the former vice president of produce at Hannaford, and a regular columnist for **PRODUCE BUSINESS**.

MORPHOLINE AND MISCOMMUNICATION



Without question, there is significant interest from UK consumers and retailers for U.S.-grown fresh produce, such as apples, due to their unique characteristics. This desire for imported American produce remains strong, despite the current economic conditions making trading difficult. In addition to challenging economic factors, the industry has faced recent pressure from a legislative quarter,

despite the high quality of such fresh produce.

The permitted use of food additives on fresh produce in the European Union has had a significant impact on UK importers and U.S. exporters of apples to the UK over the past six months, and still continues to rumble on. The issue originated back in September, 2010, when the London, England-based Food Standards Agency (FSA), the UK authority responsible for food safety, advised the Fresh Produce Consortium (FPC) and others that it had found low levels of morpholine in Chilean apples. [Morpholine is a chemical compound used as an emulsifier when creating wax for fruit.] Despite confirming that the low levels of morpholine were likely to be of little risk to

consumers, the FSA stuck to the letter of the law, namely that morpholine is not a permitted food additive under EU legislation and cannot be applied to fresh produce.

The fresh produce industry had believed that wax emulsifiers such as morpholine were processing aids and not food additives, but the European Commission confirmed that they were, and therefore subject to the EU Food Additive Regulation. The industry was faced with having fresh produce potentially treated with morpholine, including U.S. apples, already on their way to the UK. While this posed a serious problem for the UK, morpholine is a permitted wax emulsi-

fier in many other countries including the United States.

As such, UK importers urgently sought confirmation that morpholine was not an ingredient in any wax emulsifier that had been applied to their products. In some cases, it took an inordinate amount of time to secure this information from suppliers and wax manufacturers.

In the UK, FPC led the industry in fighting for a more pragmatic approach, meeting with the Food Standards Agency

and the European Commission to brief them on the impact on trade of an immediate and total ban on any products to which morpholine had been applied. The result of our direct intervention was an agreement to allow the trade a short transition period for imports of

certain produce that had been treated with morpholine that would be peeled before consumption.

There is a definite lesson from this incident that all elements of the supply chain need to understand and meet the specific legislative requirements of the European bureaucrats. That includes support from wax manufacturers who provide products that claim to meet the needs of their European customers. We may think we are part of a global market, but there are still critical differences between us at times. To ensure you have access to the European market, it is essential that you and your government authorities influence European legislators and argue your case.

pb

There is a definite lesson from [the morpholine] incident that all elements of the supply chain need to understand and meet the specific legislative requirements of the European bureaucrats...We may think we are part of a global market, but there are still critical differences between us at times.



By Nigel Jenner

Chief Executive of Fresh Produce Consortium, based in Cambridgeshire, UK

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TURN UP THE VOLUME

The way we eat says a lot about us, but so does the way we drink. Now, I'm not talking about scotch versus beer, or how much eggnog you put away at the holidays. I don't even mean how hydrated you are. I'm talking about how many fruits and vegetables we can drink (yes, drink) and how that can improve our health and well-being.

It's the green stuff (sometimes the red and the orange stuff) for me — nature's own elixir. Fruits and vegetables — juiced fresh, every day. Most days I start off with a fresh fruit juice of pineapple, watermelon, grapefruit or apple. Then by mid-morning I launch into a green-veggie-based fresh-squeezed juice. This is usually heavily weighted towards kale, Swiss chard, spinach, parsley, ginger and some apple to sweeten it a touch. Lunchtime comes and I start to chew for the first time that day. A salad-based lunch is usually on the menu. If I'm still hungry in the afternoon I'll grab another green juice, and then by the time dinner comes along I pretty much eat like most Americans. This is how I've gone from somebody that ate a very small amount of fruits and vegetables to someone that now eats five to six times what the average American consumes. And I don't miss my old ways at all. In fact, at dinner, I have no guilt, no feeling sorry for myself and no negative feelings about what I've eaten that day.

I swear by fresh juice, because fruits and vegetables quite literally saved my life. I used to be obese. I used to take a lot of pills every day for aches, pains and rashes I brought upon myself with unhealthy lifestyle choices. I was so fed up I made a documentary film about myself called *Fat, Sick and Nearly Dead* (www.fatsickandnearlydead.com). The film documents my 60-day juice fast in the U.S.A. on which I shed 100 lbs simply by drinking fruits and vegetables. Since losing the weight and embracing a plant-based diet in a big way, I have been absolutely medication- and symptom-free and I couldn't feel better. In my fight against illness and obesity, my weapon was a Breville juicer and my artillery was fresh produce — loads and loads of it.

It's quite simple really.

Could you imagine your customers eating seven pounds of fruits and vegetables a day?

When you're on a juice fast or just drinking juice regularly, you are able to ingest many more fruits and vegetables and really harness the power of the micronutrients they provide. Juicing is really a volume proposition. It's all about getting the most out of fruits and vegetables. I would never sit down and eat three apples, but I could easily juice them and drink them in a matter of seconds.

National nutrition guidelines recommend that Americans eat five to ten servings of fruits and vegetables a day. But we are not there yet. In fact, we are nowhere near that. The typical American only has two servings a day and currently only 22 percent of Americans eat five or more servings a day. We have a lot of work to do educating the consumer about the benefits of fruits and vegetables. Companies like

Dole are leading the charge in this educational process with efforts undertaken by the Dole Nutrition Institute and through innovative marketing partnerships like the Reboot Your Life with Dole Campaign. But we can all pitch in and impact the

national figures (and sell a whole lot of produce along the way) by promoting the benefits of juicing. We could get the volume we need from fruits and vegetables and then some, simply by making juice.

Consider this: A typical fresh juice contains seven servings of fruits and vegetables, meaning if your customer was to partake in a five-day juice fast, drinking four to six fresh juices a day, he or she would be taking in 28 to 42 servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Over the five-day period, the customer could consume upwards of 210 servings of fruits and vegetables. Nutritionists I have consulted reckon a five-day juice fast helps you ingest 17 times the average consumption of fruits and vegetables and seven pounds of produce a day. Could you imagine your customers eating seven pounds of fruits and vegetables a day? It's unthinkable ... but it's drinkable.

Look at your customer base today. Look at who is visiting your produce sections several times a week and really buying in volume. You can be sure your best customers are juicers. Promoting a culture of juicing regularly, where we incorporate fresh juice into our daily routines is not just good for our health, it's good for your business, too. **pb**



By Joe Cross

Joe Cross is the founder of Reboot Your Life, a health and wellness company that offers support, encouragement, community, media and tools to everyday people. The company helps people change their eating habits by simply adding more fruits and vegetables into their diets. Reboot Your Life offers information on nutrition, customized Reboot Juicing Programs and support to consumers. Visit www.jointhereboot.com today.

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Trinity Fruit Sales	65	559-433-3777	www.trinityfruit.com
Uesugi Farms, Inc.	64	408-842-1294	www.uesugifarms.com
United Fresh Produce Association.....	83	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
United Fresh Produce Association.....	88	202-303-3400	www.unitedfresh.org
The USA Bouquet Co.	109	800-306-1071	www.usabq.com
Valle Maule S.A.	44	56-73-226-892	www.valle-maule.cl
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Vision Import Group	85	201-968-1190	www.visionimportgroup.com
Walla Walla Gardeners' Association, Inc.	92	509-525-7071	www.wsonion.com
Well-Pict Berries	80	831-722-3871	www.wellpict.com
West Coast Tomato, Inc.	65	941-722-4537	www.westcoasttomato.com

A LIVING LEGEND



On March 8, 2011, family, friends, colleagues and people throughout the food industry gathered to celebrate Anita Fial's 50-plus years in food communications, which culminated with her tenure as president of Lewis & Neale for 23 years. More than 120 people attended Fial's retirement party at CRT/tanaka's New York office. Pictured above right are Ruth Lowenberg, executive vice president and new head of the Lewis & Neale Food practice at CRT/tanaka; Ed Leo, Chairman and CEO of Country Fresh Mushroom Co.; Anita Fial; and Paul Allen, president of the Florida Sweet Corn Exchange, at Anita's Golden Celebration Party.

"Anita has been a mentor to many and a PR industry giant, especially in food communications," said Mark Raper, president of CRT/tanaka, which acquired L&N as a wholly owned subsidiary in 2009. "She will be missed. But we look forward to accessing her wisdom and expertise as a consultant for many years to come."

A highlight of the evening was the presentation of a Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Foodservice Editorial Council (IFEC) in recognition of Fial's long-time involvement and role in helping the organization grow for more than five decades.

Following the award presentation was the announcement of a scholarship established by CRT/tanaka and Lewis & Neale in Fial's honor, to be administered through IFEC for continuing education in food communications. To date, more than \$9,000 has been raised for the scholarship fund.

Fial joined L&N 57 years ago after earning a home economist degree from Cornell University. Since then, the agency and Fial have represented numerous associations, regions and countries in promoting consumption of high-quality food while educating consumers, retailers and chefs about qualities and benefits. Upon joining the team at L&N, Fial spent several

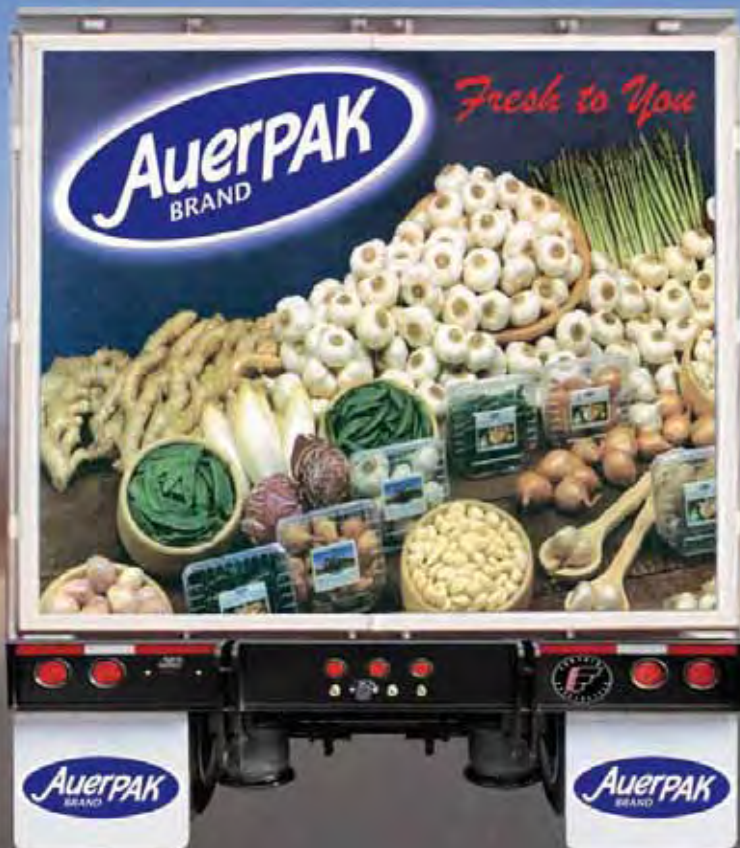
years as a test kitchen assistant, in which she delivered products to the growing number of food and home publications in New York and made regional television appearances throughout the country on behalf of clients. The photo above left, taken in the late 1970s, shows Anita in the test kitchen at L&N's old offices in the Empire State Building, filming a 2-minute educational segment that would be distributed to television stations.

Eventually, however, Anita was ready to "drive my own buggy," as she put it. By that, she meant account work. She excelled, working her way up through the ranks to eventually become president and sole owner of Lewis & Neale, opting to keep the name she helped build into a leader in food marketing.

These roots provoked a deep interest in teaching a new generation of professional women and young mothers how to prepare simple, yet delicious meals using fresh and authentic foods. Today, the agency continues to utilize its in-house test kitchen for recipe development, tastings, contest judging and events. L&N's focus on food, specifically produce, has mirrored Fial's passion to help people eat better, enabling her clients to grow during her years in the industry. "Always have pride in what you represent, and the enthusiasm will come naturally," Fial said. "I have always seen myself as an educator, perhaps because of my home economist schooling."

Throughout her tenure in the industry, she has honored her beginnings by mentoring numerous young people in her charge, as well as chefs, writers and personalities who she believed in long before the country knew them. Her advice for young people in the industry: "Get out to conferences, conventions, meetings, anywhere that you get a chance to interact with others in the industry. What you learn and the relationships you build there cannot be done sitting behind a desk."

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